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AMY DREW HER REVOLVER, AND FIRED IT OFF SEVERAL TIMES IN RAPID SUCCESSION,
AT THE SAME TIME UTTERING A LOUD SCREAM OF TERROR.

OR,
A GOOD MAN DOWN.

A Story of Mining and Undermining in
the Black Hills.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,
AUTHOR OF "THE JOLLY PARDS" SERIES, THE
"PATENT LEATHER JOE" SERIES, THE "TI-
GER DICK" SERIES, "LITTLE JINGO,"
"COLORADO KATE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
IN THE DEADWOOD COACH.
THE Deadwood coach drove into Twin Buttes
with only one passenger; but, in the robust elo-
quence of Billy Boston, the stage-driver, that
passenger was, alone and individually, "a two-
hoss team an' a yaller dorg under the wagon!"

"Fur style," continued Billy—"short upper lip, high instep, an' sich— But, thunder an' Mars! jest look a' them Sarrytogie trunks! She's a blue-blood, I—tell—you!"

What had particularly won his admiration was the fact that, instead of fretting or sighing, his fair passenger seemed quite superior to the fatigues of the journey.

At Bigelow's Ford she had looked at the swiftly-running water with a critical eye, and while listening to the roar of a fall a little way further down the stream, had said, quietly:

"If it is all the same to you, I should prefer to take my chance on the back of one of the horses, rather than run the risk of being swept over yonder cataract in this old ark."

"Waal, marm," answered Billy, scratching his head with mingled pleasure and embarrassment, "ef you 'low to be able to handle one o' them critters—"

"I am used to riding," was the quick interruption.

"Without—ahem—wettin' yer feet, ye understand," persisted Billy, his voice increasing in volume and explosiveness, as he neared the climax of his objection—

"I'll look out for that," the lady assured him, a twinkle lying in ambush under her long eyelashes.

"Waal, then, says I," cried Billy, slatting his thigh vigorously with his long-suffering hat, "wade in!"

Thereupon he unhitched one of the animals, and placed it at her disposal.

Using his knee as a mounting-block, the lady perched herself on the back of the horse, drawing up her feet and tucking her skirts about them, and so forded the stream without getting so much as a sprinkle on her neat gray traveling dress.

Then it was that Billy had compressed all his glowing admiration into one round phrase.

But this little adventure was followed by an incident which left him open-mouthed and breathless with surprise and delight.

They were bowling along in fine style, down grade, and Billy was showing off his skill with the ribbons, flattering himself that he held the lady's attention, and was winning some return of the admiration he lavished upon her, when they started up a jackass rabbit, which "ran like a white-head," till the lady brought it up on its haunches with a succession of shrill whistles. Then, drawing from the folds of her draperies a small revolver, she keeled Jack heels over head with a snap shot.

Having already, as we have said, "swung his best trump," in the way of compliment, Billy was now forced to "throw off" on this new "lead," by muttering feebly:

"Waal, I sw'ar!"

He knew that she was booked for Camp Seaton, and was a relative—since she bore the same name—of Major Pollard, there in command.

"An' ef she ain't fitten' fur to be the daughter, or the sister, or the sweetheart, by gum! of a soldier—an' a blame good man at that—then curry me down with a brickbat!" said Billy Boston.

From the first Miss Amabel Pollard had talked to Billy with charming freedom, expressing her interest in the people and the life of this country, so different from her Eastern home.

Like a true Westerner, Billy had felt it a patriotic duty to "blow" everything on the two slopes of the Watershed in no stinted terms, and it was with great satisfaction that, at Twin Buttes, he found that his words were about to be borne out by a practical illustration.

Out through the open door of the Crooked Elbow came sounds of boisterous mirth.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho!"

"That's the worst one yet! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Waal, gents, I—"

"Hold on, Andy! Ye ain't done yet."

"But, gentlemen, I must really go."

"Nonsense! Plenty o' time yet. Freeze to him, fellers!"

"Yes! yes! Give us another, ole man."

"The coach is waiting."

"Let'er wait, then. Billy kin make up time on the Long Grade."

"What's the reason ye can't go to-morrer, or next day?"

"Impossible! My pard will begin to think I've skipped the country, as it is."

"Waal, one more round, anyway."

"Who'll pay for it, Jimmy? You've cleaned me so—"

"I'll take care o' that. No malice, Andy! Better luck next time."

"Waal—"

"Hyar's a health to those that I love,
An' a health to those that love me,
An' a health to those that love those that I love,
An' to those that love those that love me!"

Put'er down deep, boys!"

The room resounded with shouts of hearty approval, and "heel-taps" such as only the West hears.

While this continued Billy Boston turned to his passenger with a glow of expectancy on his face, and said:

"Ef you'll excuse me, marm, you'll have a show fur to see the kind o' man what this hyar country kin produce when she lays herself out."

"In the person of the gentleman whose companions seem so loth to part with him?"

"It's Sandy Andy, marm, the which I'm 'lowin' as he lays over most what you'll see in the States."

While the lady's eyes turned with amused expectancy toward the door of the saloon, he shouted lustily:

"All aboard!"

CHAPTER II.

A PRINCE OF GOOD FELLOWS.

"HOLD ON! Say!—stop that bazoo!" cried a voice from within.

Even as he spoke, the protester thrust his head out of the door, with a look of ludicrous anxiety.

"Billy, ef you're in sich a sweat, git down out o' that, an' come in hyar, an' cool off."

"Time up!" replied Billy, remorselessly.

To himself he was muttering:

"We ain't keepin' the lady waitin', ye understand, fur them beggarly galoots!"

"Bother the time! Thar's lots o' time!" urged the other.

"Come, come, gentlemen!"—in the clear, manly barytone of Sandy Andy. "You do me proud, but I can't stay with ye always."

There was a chorus of deprecation as he made his way out of the Crooked Elbow, passing through the door backward, and laughingly shaking hands with his many friends.

They thronged about him, holding his attention with a perfect fusilade of last words, as he kept on to the coach.

"Hi, thar? Hold on, Andy!" shouted a ringing voice.

And out from the Crooked Elbow rushed an enthusiastic individual, with a handful of cigars waved frantically above his head, as a last token of good-will.

"Waal, waal, Joe!" laughed Andy, as the cigars were stowed away in his pocket, only one being reserved for him to light on the spot, "you're a trump—I will say that!"

"Cheese it, pard!" protested Joe, striking a match across his heel, and presenting it to the general favorite.

Andy accepted the attention, still answering as he best could the injunctions that pelted him from all sides, to be good to himself and not to forget his friends, and so fairly backed into the coach, whence he waved a parting salute to the chattering crowd, while the impatient stage-driver cracked up his horses, and bowled him away in a cloud of dust.

He sunk back upon the seat with a sigh of contentment, only to start forward abruptly, with an ejaculation of astonishment.

"I—I—really I beg your pardon, ma'am! I hope you will believe that I didn't see you! If I had known—"

He tossed his cigar out of the window, and changed his position from the side of the lady to the front seat, opposite.

"Oh, sir! I hope you will not inconvenience yourself on my account," protested the lady, with a most winning air.

Then, while this game of deprecation tapered off in set phrases of politeness, they looked at each other, as keenly as covertly.

Sandy Andy saw a girl of not more than twenty, yet with the easy self-possession of a society belle—one used to sway in her little world. She was elegant in form and feature, and exquisitely dainty and tasteful in dress. Her hair was black, her eyes dark gray, with a striking contrast between the dead white of her complexion and the vivid scarlet of her lips.

On her side, Miss Pollard saw a man of slight yet muscular build, with the activity of a panther, and an intensity of nature sure to make him a power among men wherever he moved. He was of "sandy" complexion,—whence his sobriquet—his blue eyes, his fair skin mottled with freckles, his fiery red hair and beard, marking the Scotchman, or one of Scotch ancestry.

It was no task for a woman of her tact to put him at his ease and set him to talking, so ge-

nially and frankly that she soon learned that he was engaged in hydraulic mining near Camp Seaton.

He was then busy with the construction of a dam and a flume to carry the water with which to tear down immense banks of earth, and wash out the hidden treasure.

So great an enterprise required the organization of a stock company; and on learning who she was, Sandy Andy told the lady that he had the honor of including her brother among the subscribers.

It was then and there arranged that Miss Pollard should see the first stream of water turned upon the bank that yet held all their fortunes.

This lively chit-chat finally led round to a theme of unflagging interest in that wild country—those knights of the road whom it is far more romantic to read about than to meet.

Then Sandy Andy gave a sudden start.

"Why!" he ejaculated, suddenly. "What a donderhead I am! Miss Pollard—I beg your pardon!—have you valuables about you?"

"Valuables!" stammered the lady, startled at the abruptness of this demand.

"I heard at Twin Buttes—only in the sport with the boys it passed completely out of my head—that it would not be surprising if we had a brush with Corvette's band somewhere along the road. They are supposed to be prowling about this neighborhood, attracted by the recent heavy strikes in the hills."

"Oh! do you think that we are really in danger?" cried Miss Pollard, with a slight dilating of her eyes, but no other symptom to fear.

"Not in personal danger, perhaps, if we conclude to submit quietly to being fleeced."

"But what other recourse is there, if they attack us in force?"

"None, with a lady in the coach."

"And what should you do without my presence?"

"We might try to run through, if Billy would risk his horses."

"But yourselves? Do you count personal peril nothing?"

"Well, if there were two or three good men in the coach, and they weren't too many for us, we'd try to make it lively for them. The insiders would stand as good a chance as the outsiders. Most men will go into almost anything, in this country, with an even chance, and often at great odds, rather than lose the fun."

"Is it not a part of my brother's business to suppress such violence?"

"Unfortunately, this is a rather sizable country, and he can't be everywhere at once, you know, with his small force of men."

But even while they were deciding what was to be done with some little mementoes which Miss Pollard would not care to lose, came the challenge:

"Pull up thar, Johnny! Up goes yer hands, or off goes yer topknot!"

"Pard—an' you, marm!" said Billy Boston, to his passengers, in a rueful tone, "I hate it like p'ison, this hyar. But what's to do? They've got us bad."

And he pulled up his horses as ordered.

"We're in for it," declared Andy, flushing with chagrin.

He was wondering whether the lady would think it cowardly that he did not offer to defend her. To win her esteem he would willingly have exposed himself to a shot or two, but he couldn't well invite from the enemy a fusilade that would riddle the coach.

Miss Pollard said nothing, but her eyes became brilliant, and her cheeks flushed with indignation.

Then a masked ruffian presented himself at the coach window.

"Waal, ladies an' gents, ef you'd ruther we wouldn't make a riddle-box out'n this hyar contraption, you'll git out on the quiet, an' say no more about it."

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO CHIEFS.

Of a truth, judging from his build, his manner, and his voice, the outlaw was a bad man to parley with.

However, Sandy Andy asked, mildly:

"Will it be necessary for the lady to get out of the coach? You can receive what she has of value just as well, without disturbing her."

"We don't want no chin-music out o' you, young feller," replied the ruffian, harshly. "You git out o' hyar, you do, an' no questions asked."

Discretion was the better part of valor. Unless he was prepared to resist these fellows with force and arms, it were as well not to provoke them to needless brutality.

Andy turned to his companion.
 "Believe me, if anything could be done, you should not be exposed to this."
 "Pray, do not consider me."
 He then alighted, and assisted her to the ground.

"Ho!" shouted a voice. "What have we hyar, fellers? His nibs, Sandy Andy, ur I'm a liar!"

"Eh? is this hyar the chicken?" asked the ruffian who had first presented at the door of the coach.

"My name is Blake."

"An' mine's Corvette."

"I can't truthfully say that I am glad to meet you, Mr. Corvette; but I may be at some time in the future, under different circumstances."

The outlaw laughed at the significance which underlay this speech.

"Waal, I'm powerful glad to see you, anyway," he answered.

"I think you will be disappointed, on closer acquaintance."

"What's the reason I will?"

"I probably sha'n't pan out equal to your expectations."

"Oh, I've got a new process, what pays big!"

And the accompanying tone of voice and gesture, together with the laugh of the other outlaws, gave Sandy Andy food for reflection.

"I congratulate you," he answered, preserving his composure.

"They do say," pursued Corvette, "as how you run this hyar country."

"They flatter me!"

"Waal, I wanted to look ye over, anyway. I'm somethin' of a chief myself, and we're like to be pitted ag'in' each other now an' ag'in, along of our different notions o' minin'; bein's as how you use water, an' I use fire, ye onderstand, the which them same never did agree."

At this point one of his subordinates plucked Corvette's sleeve.

"What's wantin'?" he demanded, turning in no agreeable humor.

A word whispered in his ear caused a marked change.

"Eh? What? Ye don't say!"

And he looked keenly at Miss Pollard.

The girl bridled at his impertinence, and her eye flashed with resentment.

The outlaw took off his hat, with a profound bow.

But this was not prompted by respect. If his masked face could have been seen, it would have revealed only keen exultation.

"You've got the Pollard phiz, marm," he remarked. "I reckon, now, you're o' the same stock as the major, up to the camp."

"Hold on!" cried Sandy Andy, flushing to the temples, and stepping forward. "You have no occasion to insult this lady."

"H'st!" sibilated Corvette, lifting his hand.

And in a twinkling two of his fellows precipitated themselves upon the revolver.

There was a momentary struggle, as fierce as if the spot had been struck by a cyclone, and the two outlaws lay sprawling, while Sandy Andy stood a little apart, with his hand on the butt of his revolver.

But a score of frowning muzzles were centered upon him. He could not have got the drop on the outlaw chief before he would have been filled with lead.

"Hold on, boys!" interposed Corvette again lifting his hand. "We ain't ready to make cold pig out o' him yet."

"You shall not offer this lady indignity while I am alive to hear it!" cried Sandy, defiantly.

"You're mighty peart," was the cool rejoinder. "An' you're sly, too. I like yer style."

"Take what money we have, and let us go on, without further molestation."

"Waal, my Christian friend, you have got a gall!"

Then to one of his men:

"Take them wepons away from him."

Sandy Andy stood irresolute, looking about as if for some chance for successful resistance.

But the lady here interposed.

"Oh, sir! This is foolhardy."

"I yield for the present," said Andy, "since there is no alternative. But if you dare to take advantage of my helplessness, you had better kill me now, for some day I will call you to account!"

And in deep chagrin he flung his weapons at the feet of his conqueror.

"Cart him off to one side, commanded the outlaw chief.

Sandy Andy bit his lip at the prospect of being separated from the woman whom he was

yet powerless to protect, and already repented that he had given up his weapons without a struggle.

But there was nothing for it but submission. Two burly fellows were ready to lay hands on him, if he did not go of his own free will, and he did not court the added humiliation of a fruitless tussle, in which he would probably be roughly handled.

They took him to where their horses waited, out of sight from the road.

There he gnawed his heart out, in suspense as to what ordeal Miss Amy was being forced to pass through.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT.

SANDY ANDY need have borrowed no trouble, since Miss Pollard was not treated with discourtesy.

"You air a relation o' the major?" asked Corvette.

"I am his sister, as I hope he will shortly have opportunity to tell you," replied Amy, with spirit.

"Oh, I ain't applyin' to him!" laughed the outlaw. "I always take the word of a lady."

"If you will take my word further, you will proceed with this outrage without adding needless provocation."

"I'm 'lowin' to make what I kin out of it, now I'm in. Might as well be hung fur a sheep as a lamb, ye know."

Miss Pollard produced her pocket-book, a dainty affair, but apparently well lined with "greenbacks."

Corvette accepted it with a bow.

"Am I to be robbed of my jewelry?"

"Waal, that's a ring or two—them diamond ones—what's worth a little mint apiece. I reckon we'll have to take them fur safe-keepin'."

Without more ado Amy stripped off her ornaments, only reserving a small locket.

"Here is something of no particular value to any one but myself. If you require—"

"Say no more about it. Keep it, to remember as Corvette ain't so bad as they make him out. It galls me like p'ison to disturb a lady, an' I wouldn't do it ef it wasn't for my ornery crowd, what hain't got no sentiment nohow."

"You will excuse me, ef I do ask ye to step aside while I go through this hyar coach."

And with a wave of his hand, he had her led to the spot where Sandy Andy waited on nettles.

"He has not dared—"

"He has robbed me as politely, probably, as it is generally done."

"But why did he wish to know of your relationship with Major Pollard?"

"Out of curiosity, perhaps. He said nothing further about it."

But Sandy Andy contracted his brows in moody thought.

He did not like the look of things. Why had they been sent away from the coach?

Suddenly a thought occurred to him, and he changed color.

"Can you ride?" he asked, in so low a voice that she alone heard him.

"Certainly," she replied, looking at him for an explanation of such a question at such a time.

Sandy Andy's hands had been bound behind his back; but his captors did not know him, or they might have doubted whether that was sufficient.

Had they examined his hands they would have seen that he had a power which is of advantage to a conjurer. He had but to cramp his thumb into the palm, to make his hand almost, if not quite as small as his wrist.

Leaning with his back against a tree, and one foot raised in a posture of easy negligence, he shrugged his shoulders several times, without attracting the attention of his guards.

Then, with a sudden bound, while his bonds fell useless to the ground, he struck straight from the shoulder, and knocked one guard off his pins as if by a stroke of lightning.

He instantly grappled with the other, choking off his wind so that he could make no outcry.

Together they went to the ground, the outlaw receiving a thump of the head that effectually disposed of him for the present.

"Now there is not a moment to lose!" cried Andy, hurriedly, as he possessed himself of the revolvers of the fallen adversaries. "We have their horses. They will have to be sly to overtake us."

"This is a terrible risk!"

"To escape worse."

"What do you mean? What were they about to do?"

"To capture you, and hold you as a hostage, so that they could make favorable terms with your brother."

"Oh, heaven!"

"Allow me!"

He held his hand on his knee.

She stepped into it, and leaped to the back of one of the horses.

A shout came from the direction of the outlaws in the road.

"We are discovered!" cried the lady, in alarm.

Without reply, Andy leveled one of the weapons he had borrowed from his outlaw friends, and blazed away.

A crash in the undergrowth caused the lady to shudder.

"Now for it!" cried Sandy Andy, leaping into the saddle.

He uttered a series of wild yells, and firing his weapons among them, stampeded the other horses.

The next instant he had laid hold of the lady's bridle-rein, and was leading her at a break-neck pace over the roughest ground she had ever ridden.

"Go on ahead!" she urged. "I can follow you."

"So much the better!"

And soon she was being lashed by the branches that recoiled after his passage.

They thought that the robbers were after them in hot chase, but what was Andy's surprise to find that the uproar that greeted them at the outset soon died away in the other direction.

Turning to the left, he regained the mountain road, and there pulled up, to draw breath and see how the land lay.

A rattle of wheels announced the approach of the stage-coach, and it soon came in sight, Billy Boston lashing his horses in a way that showed he was taking advantage of the opportunity offered to make good his escape.

"Hello, Billy! What's up?"

"Waal, I sw'ar!" cried the stage-driver, delightedly pulling up his horses. "Bundle in! bundle in! We'll talk it over as we go along."

"We prefer to ride," objected Andy. "We may have another brush before we get through with it."

"No danger. We're hunky, now."

"But how did you get away? What has become of our friend Corvette?"

"The sojers! Kil didn't they clean 'em up, though!"

"The soldiers! Major Pollard?"

"No. The Leetle Sergeant, an' the swaller-tailed me-lawd-duke."

Sandy Andy's face darkened.

"Let us go on," he said, so shortly as to attract the lady's attention to his changed mood.

On second thought he turned to her.

"Pardon me! There is now no reason why you should not re-enter the coach. It will be more agreeable than that unaccustomed saddle."

"I will avail myself of the opportunity, if you please."

"You have been hurt!" he cried, looking at her face and disordered dress.

"A few scratches," she laughed. "Nature will take kindly care of them."

And slipping to the ground, she took his hand, as he assisted her into the coach.

"I have not yet thanked you," she said, lingering on the step.

"I shall be much better pleased if you do not."

Their eyes sought each other for an instant, and the lady stepped into the coach with slightly heightened color.

Sandy Andy remounted, and rode beside the coach.

The lady was speculating at the soberness of his face, when the sound of iron-shod hoofs came from the rear.

"Hyar comes the boys back. Reckon Corvette an' his crowd give 'em the slip," remarked Billy Boston.

"Let us wait for them," proposed Sandy Andy.

And as he drew up his horse, and looked back over the road, a deep indentation appeared between his brows, and his eyes took on a look quite different from that which the lady had seen in them hitherto.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVALS.

QUITE a cavalcade of Boys in Blue rode up, with a great rattling of spurs and scabbards.

They were headed by an officer whose diminutive stature and pompous air had won him the sobriquet of the Little Sergeant.

He wore huge French mustaches and imperial, and was altogether a fierce-looking manikin.

However, there was not a better fellow in all Uncle Sam's service than Captain Jules Beaupere.

Beside him rode a gentleman of an altogether different type.

That he was an Englishman, everything about him proclaimed—the cut of his dress and of his whiskers, his voice and his manner.

Now, there are all sorts of Englishmen, of course. A caricature is never fairly representative of a nation, though many people think so. But the Honorable Charles Caxton was of the staring, supercilious breed, which every true American longs to kick on sight.

The trouble with him was that, born at the wrong end of a numerous family, he saw a title of nobility in the distance, if fast living in Europe did him the favor to kill off all his brothers.

Meanwhile, he had come to America "with an eye to the main chance."

The chief characteristics of the Honorable Charles were, that he had the appearance of a good beef-eater, and was never so happy as when he was "talking hoss," or killing something.

He now wore a shooting-jacket and top-boots, and had a repeating-rifle slung to his back.

"Ah, my fine fellow!" cried the Little Sergeant, spurring up to Sandy Andy, and grasping his hand. "You are too late to see those rats run to their holes."

The Englishman contented himself with a condescending nod and a gracious:

"How do? We came near having some sport, ye know."

Sandy Andy bowed to the Hon. Charles, but he smiled genially upon the Little Sergeant, and shook his hand with a right good will, as he answered:

"I was quite early enough to get into a hole myself. But I was also fortunate enough to get cleverly out of it again."

"Eh! You don't mean to say—"

"That, but for the kindly loan of your countryman's horses, I might now be—"

"Pest!" cried the Little Sergeant, with a fierce shrug of his shoulders. "It is a libel! He is no countryman of mine. It is some—"

But at this point Sandy Andy laughingly called the exasperated Frenchman to a halt.

It was not the first time he had heard him repudiate Corvete, and he knew that the next word would be an oath.

"Allow me," he said, waving his hand toward the coach, the inside of which the Little Sergeant had not yet observed.

"Ah! Ten thousand pardons, Ma'mselle!" cried the gallant Frenchman, doffing his cap with a profound salaam.

"Miss Pollard, permit me to introduce Captain Beaupere."

"Miss Pollard? Impossible! But there! a blind man would recognize you by your resemblance to our estimable commander. Believe me, Ma'mselle, this is the proudest moment of my life!"

The Hon. Charles unbent and was good enough not to look bored at the prospects of meeting the sister of his host, and the sight of her beauty converted him completely into smiles.

"Well, now, this is good fortune, ye know," he cried, "if I have been one of a party to spare you annoyance."

"I am afraid I shall have to hold myself chiefly indebted to Mr. Blake," answered Amy, after having thanked him for his kindness, "since we were already making our escape when you fell upon the outlaws."

"Why, weren't you in the coach when we passed?"

And the Honorable Charles glanced inquiringly at the horses, which Sandy Andy had borrowed from the enemy.

When the situation was explained to him, he was gracious enough to say:

"Well, Blake is to be congratulated for his good luck. But I am sorry he has robbed me of the chance to make some offset to your brother for the hospitality I have enjoyed at Camp Seaton."

The words were well enough, but he spoke them as if they were only a polite formula, and then fairly turned his back upon Sandy Andy, as he went on, with an air which showed that he took it for granted that the Honorable Charles Caxton was to monopolize the lady, to the exclusion of all ordinary mortals.

"We have been looking forward to your arrival with more pleasure than I can tell you, Miss Pollard. But haven't you stolen a march

on us? The major led me to think that he did not expect you for a fortnight, at least, and something—if my memory serves me—was said about an escort."

"I followed my letter sooner than I intended," admitted Amy. "I have no uneasiness about traveling alone, and, to tell you the truth, I was not sorry of the chance to get to Camp Seaton without creating a commotion. If it will not shock your European ideas, I prefer to take care of myself, under ordinary circumstances."

The Hon. Charles lifted his eyebrows.

"And do you consider traveling alone in this wild country an ordinary circumstance?"

"What is the matter with the country? The Indians have been quelled, and— Well, if I had anticipated such gentlemen as we have met, I might have considered the step further."

"I must say that this is a great country!" laughed Caxton. "The courage of you American women is as charming as it is surprising."

"But will you think it an intrusion if I enter the coach with you? I have no doubt that you will convert me from a great many of those European ideas which you slyly satirize, before we reach the Camp; and I don't wish to lose the delightful informality of this chance acquaintanceship."

Miss Pollard graciously accorded his wish, and giving his horse into the keeping of an orderly, he entered the coach without troubling himself about those who were left out in the cold.

Sandy Andy fairly ground his teeth with smothered rage.

He could not bring himself to play outrider to the coach of his rival, and lifting his hat to the lady, he said, while the words almost choked him:

"I leave you in safety, Miss Pollard. Will you pardon me, then, if I press on to urgent duties of my own?"

"I am sorry to lose your company, Mr. Blake," said Amy. "I hope to see you soon at Camp Seaton, where my brother will add his acknowledgments to mine for our indebtedness to you."

Then she set his heart to beating wildly by extending her hand through the coach window.

The Hon. Charles ruffled his whiskers, and then stroked them smooth again, in silent meditation on the freedom of manners of American women, while Sandy Andy bent over the fair hand, his face suddenly rivaling the ruddy hue of his hair.

Then, with a wave of the hand to the Little Sergeant, Andy dashed away.

For ten miles he rode as if horse-flesh were iron, and thews and sinews were steel.

Then he suddenly drew in his panting horse and declared:

"What a confounded fool I am, to be sure. What does she think of such an idiot as I? That cursed snob—"

But here he stopped. He was verging upon some cynical reflections against women in general, with an application to Miss Pollard in particular, and that last consideration arrested him.

While riding that race which so many have found hopeless, to escape the demon of jealousy that raged in his heart, Sandy Andy had not taken the way to his destination. He now turned into a cross-road, and pressed forward with a business-like determination.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HON. CHARLES WILL "KICK."

MEANWHILE the coach had continued on its way, escorted by the Boys in Blue, while the Hon. Charles set himself seriously to doing the agreeable.

But in spite of his efforts to turn the conversation to buffalo-hunting, where he could ventilate his exploits with an air as if he considered it nothing more than rabbit-shooting, it got round—just how, he did not know—to the Black Hills Hydraulic Mining Company.

Then, to his disgust, Billy Boston broke in with:

"Ef you'll excuse me, marm, ef you wouldn't mind seein' the mine—what thar is of it, so fur—you kin git the chance from this hyar spot."

"I should like to see it very much," said Amy, half to the driver and half to the Hon. Charles.

Then, altogether to the latter:

"Can you point it out to me?"

But, swearing that he wasn't going to let any Johnny Bull play his hand, Billy pulled up his horses, and pointing with his whip down into a gulch where a V-shaped trough wound its sinuous length along, supported high in the air on a trestlework as fragile-looking, from that

distance, as if made of matches, he cut in ahead of the slower-speaking Englishman.

"Thar she lays. An off yon— Hallo! Yes, you bet yer sweet life thar's his nibs! D'ye see him, comin' out from them trees? See! the boys has sighted him. Hark, now, an' you'll hear 'em yell."

Miss Pollard, forgetful of the elegant gentleman who gnawed his mustache and swore mentally at her elbow, leaned out of the coach window, to follow with eager glance a horseman who dashed at breakneck speed into the gulch, where a lot of men were working like beavers.

Some one set up a shout, at sight of him, which attracted the attention of the others, and with one accord they dropped whatever they happened to be working with, and with glad yells of greeting rushed to meet him.

He drew his horse upon his haunches, and leaped to the ground among them, and the scene before the Crooked Elbow was repeated.

"Mr. Blake seems to be a great favorite with his companions," observed Amy, without looking round.

"Ah!" replied the Hon. Charles, with a bored drawl. "To tell you the truth, I know very little about him. A clever fellow, I have no doubt."

But if the Hon. Charles was so ill-informed, Billy Boston knew enough for both of them.

"Favor-itel" he repeated, giving the "i" its long sound. "Waal, I should smile! Sandy Andy don't take no back seat fur nobody in this hyar country, nor no other country!" he added, with a significant vim thrown into the stinger.

With her face beyond the range of the Hon. Charles's eye, the lady indulged a quiet smile.

But Billy Boston wasn't done yet.

All of a sudden he "cut loose" a yell that made Miss Pollard "jump," and set the horses of the coach and of the escort to pricking up their ears, tossing their heads, and rearing.

It cleft the distance, and arrested even the excited crowd down in the gulch.

They looked up, and seeing the coach, with Billy standing in his place and swinging his whip wildly, and the lady looking down at them, they plucked off their hats, and made the hills echo with lusty cheers.

Why did Miss Pollard draw back so quickly? Was it the startling abruptness of Billy's yell, or some other cause, that brought the dash of color into her cheeks.

She laughed, a little uneasily, perhaps, and said:

"The man is a savage! He will wreck the coach!"

"You'll get used to that sort of thing in this country," observed the Hon. Charles, forgetting himself in his secret rage.

She paid him for his sneer, by replying:

"I think it charming. It seems to me I have never seen people wide-awake before, and thoroughly honest in the expression of their feelings."

But after that, for some reason or other, she displayed a most winning manner to her companion, and even got him upon the subject of killing animals that never did him nor any one else any harm, so that, when they reached Camp Seaton, he was well pleased with himself, and chaffed her brother gayly on his having stolen a march on him in making the acquaintance of his sister.

Major Pollard was a soldier, with a very good opinion of himself and of his profession.

He was delighted to see his sister, of course, but he had a very straight-backed way of showing it.

Like a great many other people Major Pollard thought dignity a matter of starch and buckram, of frowning and mouthing speech.

Miss Pollard's greeting of her brother was polite, and elegant, and quiet—sufficiently so, indeed, to satisfy even the fastidious taste of the Hon. Charles.

What she was thinking about, however, was the greeting she had seen in the gulch, in which Sandy Andy was almost torn to pieces, in the eagerness of the boys to get at him.

A little languidly she excused herself, and went to rest after her journey. Alone, she sat with her elbows on the unpainted sill of the barrack window, looking at the distant mountain-tops dreamily.

And then she sighed.

That night the Hon. Charles drank, and it must be added, gambled with his host, the Little Sergeant, and the camp surgeon.

When he went to bed, he sat on the edge of his bunk, rubbing his head "boozily," and muttered:

"We'll have to fix him somehow, the confounded cad! If I have had any scruples about

making him my goose with the golden egg, I'll put them on the shelf now. We'll see what we'll see!"

And bobbing his head repeatedly, with a great deal of seeming satisfaction, he got into the bunk, fumbled the blankets over him, and went to sleep—like a lord!

Sandy Andy did not sleep a wink the whole night through.

CHAPTER VII.

A PISTOL-SHOT.

NEVER was a day of brighter promise than that on which the Black Hills Hydraulic Mine awaited baptism in the first stream of water turned upon it.

"It is a good omen, Miss Pollard!" cried Sandy Andy.

He had the happiness of a moment alone with her, save for an orderly who held her horse, and who might have been a wooden soldier for all his presence counted in the interview.

Major Pollard and the Hon. Charles Caxton would make their appearance presently, when all would set out to a point where they could get a favorable view of the operation of the mine.

Meanwhile Sandy Andy was making the most of the favor of the gods.

"I congratulate you," replied the lady. "I had no idea so much labor went into the mere preparation for the real work of washing out the gold."

"Oh, we do things on a little larger scale than we used to, with pick and pan. Wouldn't the 'Forty-niners have stared at the suggestion of a three-inch nozzle in the place of their quart-dipper, and a river-bed for a long-tom?"

"And everything is now in readiness?"

"Like the launching of a ship! I shall wave my handkerchief, and you will see the water fly."

"I am all impatience! It will be like seeing the mighty forces of nature at work, tearing down the very structure of the earth."

"You are fond of the exhibition of power, Miss Pollard?"

"Yes. It is that which makes danger fascinating."

Her eyes kindled; her cheeks flushed. Sandy Andy thought he had never seen anything so beautiful.

The light of adoration was in his eyes, irradiating his face, when Major Pollard and the Hon. Charles dashed up on sweat-reeking horses.

"A thousand pardons!" cried Caxton, biting his lip at the sight of Sandy Andy already in attendance upon the lady whom he aimed to monopolize. "Have we kept you waiting?"

"It is rather that I have anticipated the time set," replied Miss Pollard.

"Allow me!" said Andy, as the Hon. Charles was about to swing from the saddle, to assist her to mount.

"Thanks!" she answered, lifting her skirt, and putting in his palm a foot that might have been the pride of any duchess of them all.

How gracefully she leaped to place! And, once in the saddle, she sat as if born to it.

While Sandy Andy was mounting, the Hon. Charles reined to her side, as a matter of course, and they rode forward together, Caxton explaining the cause of his own and the major's delay.

Major Pollard engaged the mining superintendent in conversation, and so they brought up the rear.

While talking about flumes and crinoline hose and the fall of water, Sandy Andy was observing the graceful motions of Miss Pollard's body, as she rode before him, and extracting what comfort he could, for the chagrin of being superseded by the Hon. Charles, out of the smile she had given him at the instant of accepting his assistance to mount.

They drew rein on an eminence commanding a view of the bank containing the auriferous deposit.

This bank formed one side of a gulch, down which wound the dry bed of a mountain water-course.

Sandy Andy signaled his men with a pistol-shot, at which all sprung from the work that was occupying them to the stations prearranged.

Then he waved his handkerchief, and began to explain the situation to Miss Pollard.

"Our supply of water, as you know, comes from a dam more than a mile up the gulch, through a flume which, as small as it looks, is really large enough to go boating in."

"Just out of sight round the cliff, we have a small reservoir into which the flume empties. This reservoir supplies our hose."

"Do you see that white and black line down the face of yonder cliff?"

"It looks like a gigantic serpent!" cried Amy.

"That," explained Andy, "is a crinoline hose. The white is canvas, which before long will be indistinguishable from the black bands of iron that encircle it at intervals of only three inches, the bands being two inches wide. You can judge from that the great pressure of the water, with a fall of—say, a hundred feet."

"Follow it along the bottom of the gulch to where those two men stand, about the length of an average city block away from the base of the cliff. They are holding a nozzle of three-inch aperture, through which you will presently see the water thrown that distance, to the point of execution."

"It would be quite safe to fight a fire at so long range," laughed Miss Pollard.

"With such a head, the water would be about as destructive as the fire," said Andy.

At this point in his explanation the superintendent paused, and with a slight contraction of the brows, waved his handkerchief again, more emphatically than before.

Across the gulch came a shout, and one of the men waiting expectantly on the top of the bank was seen to gesticulate impatiently.

"What are those men doing up there?" asked Amy. "If the bank is undermined, I should think they would be likely to come down with it. I don't fancy a ride on such a land slide."

"They will be out of danger before the earth caves. You will see their office presently, if that fellow ever wakes up!"

The last was added with some show of annoyance.

"One of the men has passed along your signal," observed Amy, wishing to smooth over the balk which she saw fretted the impetuous nature of the superintendent.

"It ought not be necessary," he answered, shortly.

He had planned everything to go off "like clock-work." He prided himself on his system, and now, when Miss Pollard was by to see, it fretted him to have any hitch.

His horse, feeling its master's uneasiness, began to toss its head, and move about restlessly, tripping over its feet.

Anything that made Sandy Andy appear at all to disadvantage before Miss Pollard, was "nuts" to the Hon. Charles.

With a bored drawl, he asked.

"You will not object to our smoking if we keep well to leeward, Miss Pollard?"

"Not at all," was the reply, with a graciousness that made Sandy Andy gnash his teeth.

It did not occur to him that the lady was hiding from his rival her real sympathy with him.

Major Pollard selected a cigar from his guest's case with a matter-of-course air. What interested him was the prospective yield per cubic yard of yonder bank. All this amatory skirmishing escaped him.

"Have a weed, superintendent," said the Hon. Charles, lazily extending the cigar case.

"Thanks! At another time!" replied Sandy Andy.

And putting spurs to his horse, he dashed away to see the cause of delay, with only a hasty plea of excuse to Miss Pollard.

"Blake has an abrupt way about him—a matter of temperament, I suppose," observed the Hon. Charles.

"A very good business temperament, don't you think?" retorted Miss Pollard, so smoothly that her auditor thought of the old comparison with a cat's paw: "It makes things move."

"Oh, yes!" acquiesced the Hon. Charles, as if it would weary him to offer any opposition. "An excellent thing in business, no doubt, but rather wearying to the nerves, I should imagine."

Amy bit her lip. If she had been careless of the subject of his satire, Caxton's air would have made her laugh.

Sandy Andy had already disappeared round the cliff which shut the reservoir from view.

There was an interval, during which Major Pollard remarked upon the prospects of the mining company, and quoted statistics relative to other enterprises of the sort.

Then, of a sudden, the sharp report of a pistol smote the air like a slap in the face.

"What is that?" cried Miss Pollard, starting nervously. "See! see! those men are running! What is it they say?"

The men on top of the bank left their posts with every sign of intense excitement, running toward the point which Sandy Andy had sought, and yelling at the top of their lungs.

"Ho! Ho! Stand him off!"

"Kill him! Kill the snoozer!"

Then round the cliff came Andy's horse, snorting with terror, his saddle empty and stirrups dangling.

"By Jove!" cried Major Pollard, "they've shot Blake, I do believe!"

And putting spurs to his horse, he dashed forward to the scene of action.

But one was before him. His sister was riding like the wind, her lips compressed, her nostrils distended, her eyes wide and glittering, her cheeks and lips bloodless.

The rocky way was hazardous in the extreme. Her brother called to her warningly. She heeded him not at all.

The Hon. Charles came last, with a muttered oath.

He was shocked at the tragic death of even a rival, but he was also stung by the concern the lady displayed.

That made him say viciously:

"It may have saved me some trouble. Perhaps it is better so."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN "UGLY CUSTOMER."

AMY POLLARD having outstripped her companions, they were surprised to see her suddenly draw rein, checking her headlong course, to sit regarding with interest, yet with none of the manifestations of horror they expected, a scene not yet within their view.

A plunge or two further brought them the explanation of this.

Whatever the effect of the pistol-shot, their fears were happily disappointed.

There stood Sandy Andy upon his feet, gesticulating with every indication of unabated vigor, and addressing a stern reprimand to a fellow with a hang-dog look, who stood before him in sullen discomfiture, his head hanging upon his breast, but his fist clinched.

There had evidently been a struggle between the two, in which the latter had come off second-best.

His nose was bleeding, and one eye already began to show signs of having recently had "a shanty built over it."

He was a man of powerful build, as compared with his conqueror. One would have supposed that he could "eat him up," but experience constantly proves that looks are never "safe to gamble on." It is pluck that tells!

As we have said, Amy Pollard took in this situation at a glance, and though yet pale, she had regained her self-possession.

There are women who are terror-stricken at the sight of a physical conflict between men, especially if they are interested in the safety of one of the contestants.

Miss Pollard was not one of these. As Billy Boston had said, she was cut out for a soldier's sister or sweetheart.

She had at least one aristocratic notion—that blood will tell; that there are game men just as there are game chickens; that a gentleman can whip a man of lower breeding, even where the latter has a great physical advantage.

She now drew rein behind a screen of foliage, through which she could see without being seen, that Sandy Andy might not know that she was looking on.

The Hon. Charles Caxton rode up to her side, and stopped, but her brother kept on to the scene of conflict.

A marked change had come over Major Pollard, which she did not observe, though Caxton did.

For the first time in the weeks that had elapsed since her coming, he joined his sister and Sandy Andy in the same thought.

He was a man of intolerable pride; a Virginian, and a believer in "family."

The easy social customs of the frontier made an ordinary acquaintance between the two all right; but to view the mining superintendent in the light of a possible brother-in-law, was an altogether different matter.

No sooner did he see and understand his sister's manifestation of especial interest, than the whole man roused with the ruthless instincts of a despot.

If there was anything in this thing, he would make mighty short work of it!

It was with a very abrupt and dictatorial air, therefore, that he rode up to the combatants, and demanded:

"What is the matter? What is all this about?"

Sandy Andy was too preoccupied to notice the major's manner.

"Why, this fellow has been giving me trouble ever since I hired him, by his laziness and gen-

eral worthlessness. I put him here where he would have nothing to do but to turn on the water at my signal; and I'll be hanged if I didn't come here and find him asleep! When I roused him—"

"With a kick, blast ye!" growled the culprit, rolling his one open eye at Sandy with savage vindictiveness.

"A kick!" cried the latter. "That is only a beginning."

"A bad beginning, I should say," interpolated the major.

"Well," replied Sandy, "good or bad, it has been the means of teaching the scoundrel a lesson, I fancy."

"But what was the shooting about?"

"Why, he made for me—"

"Naturally! And you thought it justifiable to resort to firearms, after having yourself been the aggressor?"

At another time Sandy would have been quick to resent this assumption of the right to criticize his actions; but now he turned with a look of surprise and contemptuous repudiation.

"I resort to the revolver, against the fists of such a ruffian?—for that's what you seem to imagine. On the contrary, he fancied himself a master at blood-letting; so I disarmed him, and added the drubbing he deserved!"

Major Pollard frowned and bit his lip. His prejudice against Andy had betrayed him into an annoying blunder.

However, this only added to his anger.

"I think the whole thing disgraceful!" he declared. "Mr. Blake, you seem to have chosen an unsuitable time to indulge a loss of temper."

Andy turned toward the speaker with a look of utter astonishment.

Before he could find words for a reply, there came a cry of warning.

"Look out, Andy! Hi! down him, the sneak!"

Sandy knew the only danger that could menace him, and took proper steps to avoid it without looking round.

Encouraged by Major Pollard's evident favor, Black Bob resolved upon one more attempt at revenge; and taking advantage of Andy's preoccupation, he leaped for him, confident that, if he could once get him in his grip, and the major would keep the others from interfering, he could square accounts with the man who had "wiped his feet on him," and "put a head on him" in the bargain.

But Andy's employees, who had come up, were heartily in sympathy with him, and listened to the major's interference with looks of indignation.

They were quick to detect Black Bob's meditated treachery, and to a man were for dealing with him personally.

But, having evaded his onslaught by leaping agilely to one side, Andy cried:

"No! no! Keep off, boys! If he hasn't had enough, I have more of the same sort entirely at his service."

And in a twinkling all the incidents of an impromptu sparring-match were in full course.

Black Bob was "no slouch" at that sort of thing. He had strength and a certain degree of quickness, with a knowledge of how to turn them to account. Above all, he had a donder-headed endurance on which "punishment" ordinarily made but little impression. He was one of the men who not infrequently win by letting their opponent wear himself out on them.

But now there was pitted against him a man who seemed made of spring steel, for quickness, and who was up in all the points that make the "manly art" a totally different thing from what it was when the contract to knock a man out was taken by the day.

Sandy Andy lost no time in skirmishing, but evading the "maulers" of the infuriated ruffian, by leaping about as agilely as a cat, he beat a devil's tattoo on his face, until he had closed the other optic.

Then, putting all his force into a right-hander, straight from the shoulder, he landed a hot one at the base of the jaw, and Black Bob went home as if he had been struck by lightning.

"Whoop! he got thar all the same!" shouted a delighted spectator.

"An' you bet yer boots he stayed thar!" responded another.

Black Bob was out, and out for keeps—there could be no doubt of that. He lay like a dead man.

"Perry," said Andy, to one of his men, "take his place here, and turn on the water at my signal."

"Where is my horse?"

The victor was a little "blown," but he was thoroughly self-possessed.

He spoke in a cool, business-like way, as if the matter being now disposed of, they would proceed at once as if there had been no interruption.

Two of the men started to recover the horse, and leaving Black Bob to pick himself up at his leisure, Sandy Andy followed—the direction in which his horse was to seek leading him directly to the spot where Amy Pollard sat.

She would have got away, and avoided letting him know that she had been a spectator of the conflict, but that his movements were so prompt that no time was left her.

She therefore stood her ground, calmly.

"Miss Pollard!" he ejaculated, as he discovered her.

He had naturally been pale with excitement, but he now flamed scarlet so suddenly that there could be no doubt of the sincerity of his surprise.

"I beg your pardon!" he stammered. "If I had known—"

"If you had known," she replied, with a smile, "my presence could have acted only as an embarrassment, if at all. You certainly could not have acquitted yourself more creditably. I congratulate you on your mastery of that brute."

"Let us say no more about it," urged Andy. "I am sorry to have introduced anything unpleasant into your visit. If you will be kind enough to return to the spot—"

"It seems to me that we had better return home," interrupted Major Pollard, with quiet authority. "Amy, Mr. Caxton will attend you. I shall—"

"Indeed!" cried Miss Pollard, with animation, "I can see no reason why we should forego the pleasure for which we have come here. You all seem to attach more importance to this little interruption than I do. My interest in the spectacle has not been impaired, I assure you."

Her brother darted a look into her eyes, and compressed his lips in silent fury.

"As you please," he said, after a momentary struggle. "I beg that you will excuse me then, as I shall be otherwise engaged."

And putting spurs to his horse, he dashed away.

In this little encounter, Miss Pollard had shown her metal. Her brother was a man whose habit of command gave to the quietest expression of his will a sort of electric influence on most people. Yet she had not changed color, nor seemed in the least ruffled at having to oppose him.

The Hon. Charles was in delight. He saw that, under the mark of politeness, the brother and sister had had a tilt of greater significance than would have been a long and bitter wrangle between the people of coarser breeding.

And Sandy Andy was the cause of it! There could be no doubt of that. Caxton had seen the look in Pollard's eyes, when Amy betrayed herself.

How he could but admire her splendid unconcern, since she could not but suspect the cause of her brother's change of manner toward Andy.

Sandy Andy was plainly embarrassed, but of course without a full knowledge of the situation.

What he thought was, that the displeasure of the brother would be a bar to his future easy association with the woman who had gained a complete mastery over his mind and heart.

But Amy was resolved to put him at his ease, and with the delusive hopes of a lover, he plucked up courage from her seeming unconcern.

So they returned to spot from which they were to witness the first attack upon the gold bank, Amy gave the signal, and the water flew.

CHAPTER IX.

WHITEWASHING BLACK TREASON.

"EXCUSE my plainness of speech; but if you were not my guest, I should say, without hesitancy, that your interference is in bad taste!"

"On the contrary, I am about to save you from a great folly."

"What do you know of my purposes?"

"Come, come, Pollard! Your good sense will teach you that this is no time for pretending that we do not understand each other. And you ought to know, without assurance, that I am one in whom you can trust. Must I say that your honor is as dear to me as to yourself?"

Major Pollard had been pacing the floor of his apartment distraught with fury. He now

turned quickly and shot a piercing glance into Charles Caxton's eyes.

The Hon. Charles looked back at him with the cold directness that forbids inquisitive intrusion.

"Curse him!" growled the major. "I'll kill him!"

"A most excellent proceeding, if it would better the matter," observed Caxton.

"It will save the honor of my family," groaned Major Pollard, dropping his head upon his breast with humiliation at what he had been forced to confess.

And he ground his teeth and clinched his hands in fury.

"At the expense of a breach that can never be healed," suggested the Hon. Charles.

"Between the two, do you suppose I would hesitate?" cried the major, passionately.

"Fortunately, you are not placed in such a dilemma."

"What can be done?"

"There are more ways than one of destroying a man," insinuated the Hon. Charles, warily.

"What do you mean?"

Caxton did not answer at once, but hesitated, scrutinizing his man narrowly.

"Out with it!" insisted the blunt soldier.

"What are you meditating?"

"There is an adage," began the other, slowly, "to the effect that all's fair in love and war. Do you believe that?"

"No!" replied Pollard, like a pistol-shot.

The Englishman bit his lip, but he covered his chagrin with a shrug of affected indifference.

"Then I'm afraid I can't help you."

Major Pollard went up to him hastily, and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

"See here!" he cried. "I will call him out, and put a bullet through him, or he will perforate me. In either event, I shall have accomplished my object."

"May I speak freely?"

"Yes!"

"She will never speak to you again!"

Major Pollard winced as if stung. This was the first open reference to his sister.

"That may not be the worst of it," pursued Caxton. "You ought to know women. Dare you drive such a one to desperation?"

"What's to be done?" demanded Pollard, breathing hard through quivering nostrils.

"There is no use in making a fine point of it. Desperate cases require desperate remedies."

"But what was it you hinted at? Some confounded underhand means?"

The Hon. Charles flushed scarlet. It was not easy for a man who prided himself on honor to incur the contempt that vibrated in Major Pollard's voice.

"Man!" he cried, with a sudden burst of passion, "do you suppose it is an easy thing for me to strike a coward's blow? Am not I a gentleman, like yourself? But needs must when the devil drives! There is no alternative, and I am ready for any sacrifice."

"Look here!" said Pollard, "why are you so keen in this matter?"

Caxton tossed his hair from a forehead on which a cold sweat had started, and replied, with a bitter laugh:

"I have the happiness to love your sister!"

Major Pollard started back at the abruptness of this avowal, but advanced again, and clasped the Englishman's hand.

"Well," he asked, "what is to be done?"

"Are you ready?"

"Yes!"

"For anything?"

"For anything!"

"Well, then, we must kill him—in her estimation! She is a proud woman. She will not marry a beggar, nor a dishonored man."

"But he is neither. There is nothing against him but his want of position."

"We must make him both!" said the Hon. Charles, grimly.

"How is it to be done?"

"We must ruin him financially first, and then make it appear that he has been driven to desperate measures to retrieve his fortunes."

"You have all this planned?" cried Pollard, in surprise.

"I have not been so blind as you. I have had ample time to reflect on it."

"How do you propose to carry out your scheme?"

"Have you ever operated on Wall street?"

"Among those knaves who would cut one another's throats for a sixpence? I guess not!"

"Nor on Pine street—the Wall street of San Francisco?"

"No!"

"Well, I have operated on both. But I had learned a thing or two in Lombard street, London, before I saw either of them, which will serve us now."

"I don't see how."

"If this mine turns out as I am confident it will, it will be the easiest thing in the world to impoverish this fellow, and enrich ourselves while we are doing it."

"Enrich ourselves?" cried Major Pollard.

Then with a frown of disapprobation:

"This begins to look very much like a precious piece of rascality!"

"If you are so thin-skinned as that," returned the Hon. Charles, "you will not like it any better as we proceed."

"Suppose you do whatever you please, and leave me out of it altogether," suggested the major. "I confess I don't relish this sort of thing."

"Do you imagine that it is congenial business for me?"

"I will put nothing in your way, and if it comes to the pinch—"

"Will be nicely out of it!" interrupted Caxton, with a sneer.

"Will step to your side, and take the consequences—whatever they may be—of the acts I have sanctioned!" amended the major, with cold dignity.

"Forgive me, Pollard!" cried the Englishman, extending his hand impulsively. "I might have known this of you. Leave everything to me. I'll fix him!"

And while these two were plotting to sell him to infamy, Sandy Andy was building castles of hope for the future.

"Our wildest expectations will be more than met!" was his ecstatic self-gratulation. "I shall be rich! If she but love me, wealth will salve the sensitiveness of her brother."

He could not sleep with that prospect before him, but stood under the twinkling stars, and let his rapturous thoughts go out to her!

"Nothing can make me really worthy of her," he reflected. "But, then, nobody could be. And why may not I be as near it as another man?"

Meanwhile Amy Pollard was thinking of how her heart had leaped at the sound of that pistol shot which she had feared was aimed at the life of the man she—

But there would be time enough to complete that sentence, when she could do so without the hot rush of blood to her temples.

CHAPTER X. THE CAT'S PAW.

ATTACHED to the Hon. Charles was a person who next claims our attention.

We introduce him to the reader in the mess-room of the fort.

At this hour of the day every soldier was on duty, and it was the Hon. Charles's custom to take advantage of the opportunity to have the room to himself, to go through with a course of exercise which he would no sooner have neglected than his daily bath.

Behold him, then, standing in the middle of the floor, with his upper garments thrown aside, his suspenders wrapped around his waist like a belt, and his body clothed only in his undershirt.

His attitude and a pair of boxing-gloves explain the purpose of this dishabille.

His antagonist is a man with the bullet head and pugnacious jaw of a prize-fighter—not a gentleman, like the Hon. Charles—in short, his valet.

"Ah there!" cried Caxton, as he followed a lunge with a duck and a cat-like retreat.

"You got there!" replied Terry Flynn, with the stereotyped smile of the pugilist.

A reddening of the flesh over the cheekbone showed where he had received a blow which would have set an ordinary head to ringing for a good twenty-four hours.

But Terry's head was proof against anything short of a pile-driver. It had been punched until it had rather got to liking that sort of thing.

"But look out!" he warned. "One good turn deserves another."

"Give me the best you have," said the Hon. Charles, on the alert, his eyes flashing, and his face flushed with pleasurable excitement.

"I never keep nothing back."

"Plant it where I can find it."

"And thayre ye have it!" cried the Irishman, with a blow that nobody but the great Sullivan could have stopped.

The Hon. Charles staggered back, and would

have fallen, but that his valet sprung forward and caught him.

"Pon me sowl, that was harder than I thought," he pleaded, apologetically.

"Hold off there!" cried Caxton. "That's enough of that. Do you catch me whining?"

"Niver a toime! Ye'r a game wan, so ye air!"

"That's what I pay you for, and— Well, yes; I guess I've got my money's-worth for to-day."

The sweat streaming from every pore showed the exertion that had been crowded into twenty-minutes of the best athletic exercise yet devised.

The Hon. Charles took off the gloves, and together they went to the wash-room, where he threw off his clothes, and was rubbed down as if he were just out of the prize-ring.

When this process was over, he stood like an Apollo, his flesh as hard and white as marble.

Twenty minutes later he was in the saddle, riding at an easy canter, with Terry in attendance.

Away they went for their morning's airing; but the Hon. Charles had another object in view on this particular morning, in getting away from the sight and hearing of any one about the fort.

Out among the cliffs he made a slight sign, and Terry pressed forward to his side.

"Terry," he began, "we've been through some rare scrapes together."

"On the owld sod! We have that, sir."

"And I have always found that I could trust you."

"The maraudin' divil!" reflected the Irishman. "It's the woman ag'in', already!"

But aloud he said, demurely:

"I hope you'll b'lave it, sor."

"Are you willing to take some risk, if it pays?"

"Don't mintion it, sor! Sure, isn't it fur devotion to yerself I'd be goin' through fire and wather?"

"In the fullness of your devotion, would you run the risk of going—up a tree?"

But even that prospect did not phase Terry.

"Sure, sor, it's some risk we've taken together in the past. Wasn't it like her brother would put a bullet through you, and maybe through me too, the last time? He was that savage—"

The Hon. Charles frowned.

"Let up on that!" he commanded, with irritation.

"I was only saying," persisted Terry, "that, afther Misther Gerald, the major here wouldn't be a flea-bite."

"Confound you! Will you continually harp on that one string? I tell you I have other business for you—"

"It's all one to me, sor—you know that."

"It will make your fortune—say two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand pound!"

Then his face elongated, and looking narrowly at his master, he dropped his voice, and asked:

"Is it murder that it is? Sure, I've niver tried me hand at that."

"Nonsense!" cried the Hon. Charles. "What do you take me for?"

But he turned guiltily pale.

"Did you notice the fellow Andy Blake had the bout with the other day?"

"Black Bob, is it?"

"Can you put your hand on him?"

"I can that."

"I was afraid he might have left. Hasn't Blake discharged him?"

"That I dunno. But I kin have him to the fore in twenty-four hours, if ye'r wantin' of him."

"He feels pretty sore, don't he, over his thrashing?"

"He owes Misther Blake a grudge he'd jump at the chance to pay."

"Confound the fellow! He has the nose of a bloodhound!" muttered the Hon. Charles to himself. "He leaves me nothing to tell him. He must watch me like a hawk. He'd be dangerous if he took it into his head to turn on me."

He hesitated about proceeding with his nefarious plot; but then his face hardened with dogged determination.

Turning and looking straight into Terry Flynn's face, he pursued, aloud:

"Find him, and egg him on to revenge!"

"He might lay fur Misther Blake behind a bowldher," suggested Terry, as a feeler.

"No! no! none of that!"

"Annything you like, sor."

"Suppose," suggested Caxton, slowly, "he took it into his head to ruin Blake financially?"

"Wid that gold-mine at his back? It's little

it 'u'd hurt 'um to lose ivery cint he has, whin he could make it up the next morning before breakfast!"

"If nothing should happen to the mine meanwhile!"

"Oho! What would happen til the mine, I dunno?"

"What could happen to it? Suppose you think the matter over."

"The sly divil ain't putting his head in the halther!" reflected Flynn. "It's to be me altogether."

However, there was nothing faint-hearted about him, and he had not forgotten that hint at two thousand pounds for himself, though he had taken so little outward notice of it.

He scratched his head, and tried to imagine what it was that the Hon. Charles had planned.

That a scheme was already matured in the Englishman's mind he had not the least doubt. It remained for him to guess what it was.

He made several attempts, and at last, when he threw out a suggestion in sheer desperation, as the only thing left, his master, looking him steadily in the eye with a glance which made his words mean the exact opposite of what they expressed, said:

"That would ruin us all. Of course, no one would suspect that such a thing was suggested by one of us. If Black Bob should take such a notion into his head, though—"

"It 'u'd be a queer way o' getting two thousand pound out o' the thing," laughed Terry.

"To be sure," assented Caxton. "Your two thousand would go up with the rest of it, wouldn't it?"

But Terry knew his master well enough to know that that question was not tagged to the end of the assertion for nothing. It was a hint to him to question appearances.

Caxton dropped the subject at once, and touching his horse with the spur, rode on in advance of his valet.

"Well," reflected Flynn, who needed no further assurance that he had at last hit upon the plan, as unpromising as it looked, "by me sowl, I don't see through that; but I obey orders if I break owners. It's not Mr. Charles that'll be fur letting me suffer fur the want o' that two thousand pounds, I'm thinking. So here goes, whoever pays the piper!"

CHAPTER XI.

A VILLAINOUS HINT.

WHERE the presence of the master would set curiosity agog, the man could go unremarked.

Terry Flynn found his way to the lowest drinking "hole" in Blind Hoss, a mining-camp scarcely out of sight of Fort Seaton.

What gave it its disreputable character, in a country where one would expect to find little choice in such matters, was the fact that its proprietor was a "tough" of the worst description, and on the principle of "birds of a feather," villains like himself naturally congregated about him.

"Whoop! Air ye thayer, Moriarty?" shouted Terry, as he entered the Last Yell in characteristic style.

"If you've come hyar to let the racket out o' ye, it's the right shop," said Pop Perkins, mopping the bar with a rag which looked as if it had done long and faithful service in that capacity since it was last washed.

"If I let the racket out, it's only to make the more room fur the illigant liquor you dispense at that same bar, gossoon!" cried Terry, heartily. "Step up, gints! It's lost time whin the stuff's outside o' yez, so it is."

Though most of those present started forward with cheerful alacrity, one man sat in a corner with his head bowed upon his arms on a table, seemingly asleep.

"Hallo, pardner! Rout out o' this!" shouted Terry, going over to him, and striking him on the back.

The fellow started up with a snarl of rage and a ready hand seeking the butt of his revolver.

"What in—"

"Is it whisky ye're gaggin' at?" cried Terry. "What's gone wid ye, Bob, that ye'd be fur shtanding off a binifactor? Step up, man, and get health, wealth and happiness, as free as the air ye breathe."

"Thar's mighty little health, wealth, or happiness in the keards fur me!" growled Black Bob, getting upon his feet sullenly, and with no relaxation of the ugly scowl on his features.

The fact was, he had not been asleep, but was just then in that Slough of Despond called the "blues."

He was not actively meditating revenge against Sandy Andy, since it seemed hopeless to

try to "git squar'." But he was ripe for suggestion from any one who would give direction to his malice.

"To the devil wid dull care!" cried Terry. "Ye may draw all thrumps the next hand. Annyways, here's good luck to ye on the road to fortune!"

When they had drank the toast, Terry took a buckskin bag from his pocket and shook it under the nose of his sullen guest.

"Eh, me boy!" he ejaculated. "Maybe ye'd be afther getting a shtairt out o' me on that same road! What do ye say to a game o' poker?"

"Poker nothin'!" growled Black Bob. "I hain't got the smell o' a stake!"

"Is that all?" demanded Terry, as if this were the most trifling impediment. "Who but me would be fur lending ye a stake? Sure, this would be the devil's own world widout arry bit o' fun in it. Come along, man! It'll cheer ye up a bit."

Black Bob looked quickly at his generous host, who seemed to be not a little under the influence of liquor.

"Waal, I'm in fur fun, if it's to be had," he said, betraying no scruples about this one-sided sort of gaming, in which he had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

But then, there was probably no one present who did not envy him his luck.

As they played Bob won, and Terry kept calling for whisky, and getting more reckless as his purse got emptier and his stomach fuller.

When he was "dead broke," he seized Black Bob's hand and slapped him on the back, declaring that he had never met a man so much to his liking.

"But I'll have me revenge out o' ye, me boy!" he promised him. "Ye'll be fur seeing me over to the mine wan o' these foin' avenings."

"Mine be blowed!" snarled Bob, frowning blackly.

"An' what's the matther wid the mine?" asked Terry.

"I ain't hangin' out thar no more," replied Bob, with a savage oath of bitter remembrance.

They had left the Last Yell, and were walking companionably along together, with no one to check any confidence that Bob might incline to.

To such a nature as his it is a great relief to tell over its troubles; but Bob was such an ugly fellow that he had few friends, and so had been brooding over his hard luck, as he called it, in solitude.

Now, at the first word of sympathetic interest on the part of Terry, he poured forth his story with much profanity and many threats of revenge, but all so vague as to make it plain that he did not really contemplate carrying any of them out.

Terry, who had the appearance of a thoroughly drunken man, entered heartily into his feeling of hard usage.

"Bad scan til the dirty spalpeen!" cried the Irishman. "Sure, wouldn't I be fur gitting aven wid um if it was mesilf he'd used that haird?"

"I'd like to know how you'd set about doin' of it," growled Bob, sullenly.

"Whisht! wouldn't I blow him and his dirty mine into the air together? What show has an honest workin' man ag'in' wan o' thim bloated capitalists? I'm fur dynamite, I am! That's what talks, me boy!"

Then, as if this were only the aimless bluster of a drunken man, without premeditation, he proceeded to tell a string of purely fictitious exploits of his in England and Ireland, in which he threw out suggestions that led Black Bob's mind to the goal he intended, without calling his attention directly to the point.

As he rambled on, he watched narrowly the man he was manipulating, until he saw his eyes gleam with a baleful fire, and heard him grind an oath between his teeth.

When the idea occurred to him, Black Bob believed that it was all his own, and if the case afterwards had come to trial, he would have sworn that no one had given him the slightest hint about it.

"I've got him!" reflected Terry, when, with suppressed eagerness, Black Bob betrayed a disposition to get away by himself. "He wants to go and think it over without disturbance. Well, let him. I'll kape an eye on him meanwhile, and if he gets off the track, I'll hunt him on again."

So they parted, and Black Bob immediately set about maturing his scheme of revenge.

Everywhere he heard excited discussion of the dazzling prospects of the Black Hills Hydraulic Mining Company.

"I tell ye what it is, fellers!" cried an enthusiastic bummer, dirt-begrimed and with rags fluttering in the wind. "I'd jest like to be in ole Pine street, Frisco, with a round hundred dollars fur a starter! In one week's time that stock'll be jest a-boomin' like sin! Won't thar be money coined on this thing? Waal, I reckon!"

"I say, Hank!" cried one of the listeners, addressing another, "hain't you got some o' this hyar stock?"

"You bet!" was the complacent reply.

"What'll ye take fur her?"

"Two hundred."

"Oh, you git out!"

"Maybe you kin git some cheeper. Wade in!"

The well-satisfied stockholder was regarded with envy on all sides.

"You'd orter treat on it, Hank, ole man," suggested an old bummer, who saw but one outcome of any one's good fortune.

Everybody laughed.

"Wait tell I finger some o' them dividends, pard," said Hank, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and jingling some coins in pleasurable anticipation.

"The blasted fools!" reflected Black Bob, who had overheard this conversation. "I'll fix their dividends!"

And he walked off by himself, already beginning to hate the men who would be injured by his treachery, though they had done nothing to win a grudge from him.

Out in the mountain wilderness he wandered by himself, until he stood, in the darkness and silence of night, before a structure which extended from wall to wall of a ravine.

It was a dam, behind which were backed up the waters which supplied the mining company with its power.

Great blocks of stone were piled one upon another, looking as if they would withstand any force brought to dislodge them.

They faced a bank of clay, which kept the water from filtering through.

"Hyar's whar I'll git my work in," reflected Black Bob, gazing at the structure with a sinister eye. "It's lucky I dropped onto that hole in the ground. I didn't think then that it was made to my hand. What a fool I'd 'a' been ef I'd blabbed it, as it was on my tongue's end to do. I reckon nobody but me hain't got onto it, an' you bet I'll work it fur all it's worth."

"Dividends!" he growled, recurring to the conversation he had overheard. "It'll be some time before they draw any dividends out o' this thing! Ef I don't swamp that cuss, it'll be because my name ain't Black Bob! He waked up the wrong passenger when he kicked me in the ribs, an' one o' these days he'll know it, too!"

"Eh? What in Cain's that?"

With a start he slunk to cover, and peered about with the eyes of a murderer.

"It'll be an unlucky find fur the chap as drops onto me now!" he muttered, drawing his revolver, and cocking it silently.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS.

BETWEEN the day when Sandy Andy had made a mortal enemy of Black Bob and that which our story has now reached, two weeks had elapsed.

From the start the mine had "panned out" big, and exaggerated reports of the new bonanza flew fast and far.

In San Francisco everybody puts up a margin; and from Pine street to the back alley where Bridget hailed the passing iceman with a challenge to buy or sell, the stock of the Black Hills Hydraulic Mining Company was "boomed" so that fortunes changed hands on it in an hour.

The stockholders were jubilant, of course. They went to bed to dream of palaces like that of the banker Ralston, and were up in the morning earlier than ever before in their lives, to see the rising quotations in black and white across their steaming coffee.

At Camp Seaton, those interested took their good fortune variously.

Major Pollard, who yet treated his sister with frosty civility, having exchanged with her no word about the matter that glowed in her heart and rankled in his—Major Pollard was so consumed with rage as to be quite indifferent to money consideration.

He fairly hated the mine, as the indirect cause of his humiliation.

The Hon. Charles had all the worst passions of his nature roused by the prospect of inordinate wealth.

He had entered into a scheme of jealous revenge; but the thought that it would end in giving him the means to return to England and ride on the crest of the wave of popularity without waiting for a tardy title, gradually gained upon him, till one by one his scruples of honor slipped away, and he handed himself over without reserve to the devil of avarice.

He now looked upon Amy Pollard with new eyes.

If he married an Englishwoman, her social rank would be already fixed; but the beauty of this daughter of the Republic, where titles are unknown, would make all places possible to her.

He resolved to stop at nothing to secure her.

How differently was Sandy Andy affected.

All day he stood faithfully at his post, and no man read in his set features what was going on within him; but at night he gave himself up to bitterness of heart.

For two weeks he had exchanged not a word with his beloved. Was it accident, the machinations of others, or her voluntary avoidance?

What was wealth without her? A mockery! Never before had he cared for money, and now only as a stepping-stone to her side. But what if the pride which made her brother hostile animated her too?

So he wandered off by himself in the mountains, eating his heart out, until one night, in the midst of his self-abasement, a sudden ejaculation close at hand caused him to start violently, and sent his heart into his throat, to flutter as it had never done before.

As he looked up, the foliage was swept apart, from which emerged a figure that had haunted his thoughts continually, so that now he was almost tempted to doubt whether it was reality or only a little more vivid figment of his imagination.

But the figure sprang forward with extended hands that grasped both of his convulsively, and a voice that set all his nerves to tingling exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Blake! is it you? I have been so frightened!"

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "Miss Pollard! Can it be?"

She laughed, with a hysterical shiver.

"Don't scold me!"

She lifted her pale, frightened face to his, made whiter by the moonlight, so that its delicate features looked like chiseled marble.

Never had she seemed so beautiful to him.

"But what in the world are you doing here at this time of night?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"I have met with an accident," she replied, "and have been lost! Oh, it was terrible! terrible! I nearly died with fright when I heard your footstep; and then—oh, when I saw it was you—"

She broke off, with an inarticulate, murmuring sob, clinging to his hands, and shrinking close to his side.

His head swam with a mad consciousness of her reliance upon him. He did not know that he put his arm about her to support her trembling form. It did not occur to him that he was taking an unfair or ungenerous advantage of this moment when she was completely unnerved. He was not aware that he called her Amy. Indeed, he never knew what he said to her. It came out all in a rush. He must have told her everything. At any rate, he held her as if he would never let her go again, and she was sobbing on his breast, and did not repulse him when he pressed his lips to hers.

In the midst of it all, she suddenly gave a violent start, and fairly tore herself from his arms, to peer apprehensively among the shadows that surrounded them.

"Oh, what was that?"

"Nothing, my darling!"

"Yes! yes! I certainly saw something. There! there!"

He followed the direction of her outstretched finger, but could see nothing.

He listened, but all was still.

"It is only your imagination, but to satisfy you, I will go and see."

"Oh, no! no!" she cried, seizing hold of him, to detain him, with every manifestation of fear for his safety.

That was wine to his happy love.

He caught her in his arms again, with a cry of delight.

But she resisted his caress.

"Let us go away! Oh, how imprudent this is!" she murmured.

It chilled him a little. The world was already coming between them again.

He gave her his arm, and chose the path for her, carefully putting aside the branches.

"Where are we?" she asked. "I haven't the slightest idea."

"This is the upper dam," he answered. "Didn't you notice the flume?"

"I was too frightened to notice anything! But we are not far from the fort now, are we?"

"A mile."

"Oh! And it is so late! What will they think has become of me?"

"We shall soon be there," said Andy; feeling how soon he was to lose her.

"And my poor little mare—poor Fleetfoot! I haven't told you yet—have I?—how I came to be here at such an hour, and in such a plight. The poor creature slipped and fell—"

"You were thrown! You have been hurt! Why did you not tell me at once?"

Sandy Andy interposed with a lover's quick anxiety.

She lifted her face to his, and tightening her clasp upon his arm, reassured him with a smile.

"Oh, no. I am all right. But poor Fleetfoot! She is helpless. It wrung my heart to leave her. You should have seen her piteous look when I went away! I rubbed her leg and bound my handkerchief about it; but the pain was so great that she refused to try to get up. As it began to get dark, I was afraid to stay on; so I tried to make my way to the fort alone. I lost my head, as it grew darker, and I have been wandering about ever since. Oh, I can't tell you the horrible sense of loneliness!"

"But how came you to ride out alone?" asked Andy.

She quickly averted her face, but not so quickly as to hide from him the flush that mantled her pale cheeks.

"I—I—"

But she stammered wretchedly. How could she tell him that she had so longed to see him, that she had ridden out by herself in the half-acknowledged hope of a chance meeting with him—at least the chance of seeing him from a distance.

Now she assured herself again and again that nothing would have induced her to let him see her, but the stress of circumstances in which fate had thrown her.

Well, we don't know about that. The heart is a queer thing. It isn't always reliable.

Sandy Andy was not a coxcomb. The truth never dawned upon him. Instead, a thrill of fear shot through him.

"I—I beg your pardon!" he stammered, as if he had been guilty of an indiscretion.

She could not correct his misapprehension. Maiden modesty forbade.

"Poor Fleetfoot!" she resumed, slipping away from the subject. "My first care will be to take some one to her. If she cannot be got to walk, or cannot be carried to the fort, some one shall stay with her."

"Let me go for the mare. Where is she?" he asked, longing to serve her in something where her affections were involved.

"Oh, no!" she objected, stopping short in sudden trepidation.

Once more the dread of he knew not what smote him, and he stammered:

"I beg your pardon! I hope you will believe that intrusion—"

But he could not proceed in that vein. The words choked him.

She put her hand on his shoulder, and looking up into his troubled face with a distress that would not be disguised, went on, with her breath aflutter:

"It must never be known that I have met you to-night. You must take me in sight of the fort, and then let me go on alone. You don't know—"

"But I do know!" he insisted, suddenly seizing her in his arms. "Oh, Amy, my darling! am I never to claim you before all the world? Will you let pride part us forever? What is this cold-blooded worldliness, compared with the love we can give each other? But even that I shall be able to buy up, thanks to the mine that is going to make all our fortunes. You do not know how rich I shall—"

"And do you think that I—"

She drew back, with swift, wounded dignity.

"You? Oh, no!" he replied, not letting her go. "But, since we both know the obstacle, let us not talk about it. Only you must promise me—oh, you must!—that you will not let it separate us absolutely. I am willing to wait and to work. Give me time. I will be patient, discreet, anything that leads me ultimately to your love."

With a quick impulse she threw her arms about his neck.

"Never! never! never!" she cried, passionately. "How could you doubt me? If it comes

to the last resort, nothing in all the wide world shall prevail with me against—"

"Against what?" he asked, ecstatically, as she paused.

"The love I bear you! Haven't you seen it from the first? Oh, that terrible moment when I thought that brute had shot you!"

It was the first intimation he had had of what had brought her to the scene of his struggle with Black Bob.

"Oh, you must be careful!" she urged. "The enmity of such a man is more to be feared than—"

"As if I could fear anything in all my life, after this!" cried Andy.

"But you must do nothing to make an open breach," urged Amy, reverting to her brother's hostility. "Try every means of conciliation first."

"I will. But if all fails? Oh, you don't know the dread that seizes me when I think of it!"

She took the best means to satisfy him, and then urged that they lose no more time.

As they came in sight of the fort, they saw signs of commotion. Lights were flitting hither and thither; men were getting into the saddle in haste.

"See! they are coming in search of me," said Amy, as a cavalcade issued from the stockade, headed by her brother and the Hon. Charles Caxton. "Now you must leave me to go on alone. Do not let them see you!"

He took her in his arms once more.

"Forever!" he whispered.

"Forever!" she echoed, her breath fluttering on his lips.

A moment, and she was hastening toward the approaching horsemen, while he skulked off like a thief in the night!

What could be more bitter than this to an honorable love? The world might not see it!

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDERGROUND.

It was Black Bob of whom Amy Pollard had caught a glimpse.

If Sandy Andy had not been so confident that no one could be prowling about in that seeming solitude, he would not have allowed himself to be so lightly drawn away from the spot.

"All the more luck fur him!" muttered Black Bob, with a murderer's grimace. "I wouldn't like nothin' better'n a crack at him. His girl, what seen him down me, would 'a' stood a show fur to see me salivate him fur all he was worth. Blast him! I'll lay fur him bad, yit!"

There was not a little "buncum" in this threat. The truth was that Black Bob shrunk from the thought of shooting at his enemy, with all the sickening thrill of cowardice. At the same time, if cornered, he might be dangerous.

But now a new channel had been given to his thoughts, all in keeping with his base nature.

"Sparkin', air they?" he reflected, "on the sly, an' at this time o' night, out hyar whar the very dickens wouldn't look to see sich like! I'd 'a' 'lowed as they was too high-toned fur that. But I reckon the major, he won't have it no-how, an' they know it. That's what made him so wrathful. I wondered what had got into him, fur to take up fur the like o' me, what he wouldn't wipe his shoes on, he's that high an' mighty. Waal, I 'low I begin to see a hole whar I kin git my work in, an' fetch him, down a peg. I don't owe him nothin' fur takin' my part."

He ruminated this new scheme of revenge, the treachery of which was especially grateful to him, as he prowled about the spot, after Andy and Amy had gone.

"I hain't got the slight o' writin'," he said to himself. "That stands in my way. Reckon I'll have to let out that thar part o' the job. Waal, what's the matter with Billy Cabinney? He slings a nasty quill when he's sober. I reckon, now, come to think, it wouldn't be a bad plan to git him to stand in with me, anyway. We're old side pards, an' he must 'a' got about as much o' Andy Blake's slack as he wants, by this time."

This idea of having some one to help him in his scheme pleased him so well that he immediately set out to secure his pard.

He found Cabinney where Terry Flynn had found him, at the Last Yell.

Billy Cabinney was just the kind of a little rascal that a sneak-thief is made of. At the same time, he admired in Black Bob the qualities he was conscious of lacking.

Bob was a bully among men of his own kind. Where he was not cowed by the superior intel-

lect and pluck of his antagonist, there was a ferocity about him that made him generally feared.

He had the reputation of being a "gouger," and it was known that he had bitten off the end of a man's nose.

As he entered the Last Yell, he saw Billy Cabinney cowering against the wall, holding up his hands deprecatingly, and crying, in the shrill treble of the poltroon:

"You leave me be, Dave Binns! I hain't done nothin' to you!"

"Aw! ye blatherin' monkey, I'll snatch the head off ye!" growled the burly ruffian, who stood before the cringing wretch, menacing him with a black scowl and a fist like a sledge-hammer.

"Hi, thar, Bully Binns!" shouted Black Bob, quick to seize the opportunity offered to win a claim upon Billy Cabinney. "Let up on him if ye don't want me to chug ye in the neck."

"What's gone wid you?" demanded Binns, sullenly.

"I'll show you," answered Bob. "Ef you want to row, take somebody o' your size."

"The blatherskite hain't got no call fur to go fur me!" cried Cabinney, with a sudden exhibition of rage, the moment he saw that he was backed by Black Bob. "I'll put a hole in him—that's what I will!"

And he seized the butt of his revolver in a most bloodthirsty way.

Like a flash Bully Binns "covered" him.

"You drawer that thar weepin'!"

But with a gasp of horror Cabinney threw up his hands in appeal for mercy.

"Hold on, Bully!" he pleaded. "I didn't go fur to mean that, nohow!"

But already Black Bob's six-shooter was out.

"Drop it!" he commanded, "or I'll bore ye, sure!"

Binns lowered his weapon, and edged away so as not to stand directly between his adversaries.

"How many of ye does it take to mount one man?" he asked, savagely.

"I hain't no row with you as long as ye play yer cards straight," answered Bob, who really had no desire for a fight just then.

There was a great deal of bluster before they finally quieted down to a sullen armistice.

Billy Cabinney's insolence threatened to make an adjustment impossible, but at last Black Bob shut him up, and finally got him out of the saloon.

The enemies parted, threatening to have it out at another time, Bully Binns giving Cabinney such a black scowl of baffled rage that the little rascal felt that his only safety was now in a close alliance with Black Bob.

If it was known that Bob was his "backer," Binns would be afraid to "mount" him, even when he was alone.

Cabinney was therefore ripe for Black Bob's proposal that they strike hands on a partnership.

"But first," said Bob, "I want to put through a scheme what ain't goin' fur to show up no money, but what's better'n money to me."

"I'm with ye, me boy, if thar's fun in it," replied Cabinney, who always wanted to be thought a very reckless fellow.

"I'll swear ye not to split on me, to begin with," said Black Bob, coolly, as if there was nothing in the implied suspicion to wound the self-esteem of his companion.

In this he proved to be right. Cabinney seemed to take it for granted that some such assurance might properly be exacted from him.

He was profuse in his promises of fidelity—quite too profuse, indeed.

Black Bob made him repeat an oath that was ridiculous in the superstition it appealed to, and then betrayed his own slight reliance upon its binding force, by adding:

"If ye do give me away, Billy, I'll— Waal, never mind; but jest you look out fur me—that's all!"

Then he laid open his plot.

"I want you to steal some dynamite fur me from Andy Blake's powder-house. You've got the best show fur to do it of any man what's workin' fur him."

"You bet!" replied Cabinney. "I kin do it as easy as rollin' off a log. But what air you 'lowin' to do with that thar, I'd like to know?"

"I'm 'lowin' to blow up the dam, an' knock their mine into a cocked hat!"

"The dickens you be! Waal, you've got a resky job on your hands, my Christian friend!"

"Nary resk!"

"Nary resk? Do you 'low as they're goin' fur to stand by while you bore into the wall o' that thar dam, an' plant your dynamite?"

"An' do you 'low as I'm sich a fool as to go at it in that way?"

"You've got to git under her to lift her, hain't ye?"

"Waal, I've got a back door to my leetle side-show, pard."

"A back door?"

"I'll show it to ye."

To make his word good, Black Bob took his pard to the dam even that night.

On the side of the gulch opposite to that along which the flumes ran, Black Bob finally came to some rocks that were piled up so that it looked, in the daytime, as if they were impassable.

"Have you ever been along hyar?" he asked.

"Along hyar?" repeated Cabiney. "What's the use o' knockin' yer shins over these rocks, when you kin take the old bed o' the stream without no trouble?"

"That's jest what more'n you has thought about it, ef it ever entered their head at all," replied Black Bob. "But it pays to nose about, once in a while, in places what nobody else don't see no use in goin' over. You do as you see me, an' you'll find out."

Thereupon he proceeded to climb over the rocks that obstructed the way, until he dropped down into a sort of hollow among them.

Stooping, he rolled a boulder from the spot where it lay, seemingly wedged tightly between two boulders of such immense size that it appeared impossible that either of them could be moved by any ordinary force.

Then he said:

"Lend a hand hyar."

He put his shoulder to one of the boulders, bracing his feet against the cliff of which it seemed to form a part.

Billy Cabiney imitated his example, and was surprised at the ease with which they rolled the huge rock over against the mate from which it had been separated by the dornick which Bob had removed.

"Waal, I sw'ar!" cried Billy. "Thar's a hole in thar!"

"Thar ain't nothin' else," answered Bob.

"Did you make it?"

"Don't be a fool! How could I make a cave?"

"A cave!"

And Bill stared into the black hole from the mouth of which the stone barrier had been rolled away.

"But I put the door to it, anyway," pursued Bob. "I don't know why I done it. But I jest 'lowed it would stand me in hand to keep that secret to myself, some day."

There was nothing mysterious about the prompting to this act which was now to serve the purpose of his revenge. The simple fact was, that Black Bob was a selfish churl, and he yielded to the impulse to hide what he had discovered from others, even if, as he then supposed, it could never do him any good.

Dropping upon all-fours, the plotters entered the cave, within which Black Bob, to his companion's surprise, procured torches, by the light of which he proceeded to show the interior.

"You see how this hyar thing turns," he said—"so's to go up-stream toward the dam."

"It looks to me like a ram's horn," answered Cabiney, bewildered by his strange surroundings.

"Waal, I've measured it all, an' I kin locate every step o' the way. Do ye see that thar spot? And he struck a particular place on the side wall.

"It's easy enough to see it," answered Cabiney; "but it looks like all the rest of it to me."

"Waal," said Bob, "that thar's opposite the dam, jest back o' the face wall. Knock out ten feet o' that thar stone, an' it fetches ye to the clay what holds up all the water yonder. You tunnel a piece into that, set your load, touch 'er off, an' up goes Mr. Dam, an' ye clean up that flume all the way from hyar to Cass's Flat."

"An' who's goin' to do all this hyar tunnelin'?" asked Billy, with a dubious look of satisfaction.

"I be," answered Bob, promptly.

"An' what be I supposed to be doin' all this while?"

"You go ahead with your reg'lar work, as ef nothin' wa'u't goin' on. Only you steal me what dynamite I want, an' the tools to work with."

So said, so done! Black Bob toiled away with a zeal that he had never before thrown into work, until all was in readiness for the execution of his revenge.

Then came an event for which he was not altogether prepared.

CHAPTER XIV.

TIME TO ACT!

MAJOR POLLARD was too proud a man to think of such a thing as spying upon his sister's

coming and going. Moreover, he was too much preoccupied by his military duties to know what she ordinarily did with her time, apart from those hours when the daily round of domestic and social life threw him into her company—at meal-time and in the evening, or on some pleasure excursion.

He did not know that from the first she had made a practice of riding by herself.

The Hon. Charles had undertaken to place himself at all hours at her disposal; but when, with a woman's tact, she had eluded his politeness, and he came to understand that she preferred to be alone, he could but look on in astonishment.

If she had taken a groom with her, it would not have been so bad; but solitary rides, in such a place!

If she had not been so beautiful, he would have set her down as eccentric, shrugged his shoulders, and troubled himself no further about her.

As it was, prompted by pique and jealousy, he was at some pains to ascertain what she did with herself.

Terry Flynn was his agent in this espionage, and the valet's report was that she seemed to have made the acquaintance of a miner's wife, who was ill, and to whom she took little dainties to eat, and flowers which she plucked out among the crags.

Having satisfied himself that there was no meeting between her and Sandy Andy, the Hon. Charles had let the matter drop.

So came an evening when Amy's chair at the foot of her brother's table was vacant.

On making inquiry for her, he was told that she had not returned from riding. Asking who had attended her, he learned that she was alone. Expressing surprise at this, he for the first time discovered that she was in the habit of going on these solitary excursions.

That sent the blood into his face, and made it recede again, leaving him white with amazement and displeasure.

He avoided the eye of his guest. What would the Hon. Charles think of this exhibition of American manners? It was so far from being "English, ye know!"

But there was another consideration, far more important than this. What was the meaning of this strange practice?

Was it possible that she could so far forget herself as to go to assignations with Sandy Andy?

It showed how much the suspense of the past two weeks had preyed upon his mind, that this fear should now occur to him. Two weeks ago he would not have believed it possible for him to suspect her of such a lowering of her dignity.

He knew his sister as a proud woman; but then her pride was not that vanity which is so often misnamed pride. It was of a kind which, he felt, might, in an exceptional situation, lead her to disregard social laws, and order her conduct according to her own will.

And now, what was to be thought of this prolonged absence?

Most men would have been alarmed, fearing that she had run into some danger.

Major Pollard's first icy dread was, that she had eloped with Sandy Andy!

In a breath he ordered his men to horse. Then, pausing for a moment at Caxton's side, he seized his wrist, and grated between his teeth:

"This is your work! If what I fear is true—"

"My work!" gasped the Hon. Charles, in amazement.

"Bah!" ejaculated the major, seeing his guest's misapprehension with impatience.

Then he explained his meaning.

"If you had let me alone—"

But here he checked himself. It occurred to him that, if his suspicions proved unfounded, it would not be pleasant to reflect that the Hon. Charles knew he had held them.

"It was too late, however. Caxton, whatever his faults, was not wanting in quickness of wit.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, looking Major Pollard straight in the face. "I confess you astonish me. Such a thing is impossible."

Major Pollard rushed away with a smothered oath.

The Hon. Charles was the more positive, in that he had received the report of his valet only a few days before. His only fear, therefore, was that some accident had happened to Amy.

When they came upon her hurrying to meet them, carrying the trail of her long riding-habit on her arm, Major Pollard was plainly moved out of his usual self-control.

"Amy, what in heaven's name is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

That he should speak to her so before others told her plainly enough the state of his mind, but she pretended not to notice it.

As we know, she had been thoroughly frightened and nearly exhausted before meeting with Sandy Andy; but there was now no trace of fear or weariness about her.

Her eyes burned with a steady light, and she met her brother's gaze without disconcertion.

"There is no need of all this commotion on my account," she said, with a touch of annoyance.

"I have met with a slight accident, that is all. My horse fell and strained a joint. But now that you are out in such force, if you will provide me with a mount, we will go and see if poor Fleetfoot can be got to the fort. I had to abandon her when it began to grow dark."

The soldiers gazed at this cool lady with unbounded admiration. Their notions of social propriety were nowise strict, but they thought that they knew pluck when they saw it.

"At this time of night?" exclaimed Major Pollard. "Absurd! Some one shall be sent to look after her in the morning."

"In the morning!" cried Amy. "Why don't you admit that you're willing that she should die out there alone?"

She turned to the soldiers.

"If you are afraid of discomfort," she said, "I will pay handsomely for the trouble of having my mare properly cared for."

The boys looked as if only military discipline kept them from cheering her on the spot. As for money, there was not a man Jack of them but would have gone to the ends of the earth to serve her.

Knowing the futility of opposing her when she was decided, Major Pollard called a squad of men out of the ranks to be placed under her direction. But Amy insisted that while she could show them the way, she could not describe the spot where her horse was to be found so that they could find it.

In the end she accompanied them, attended by her brother and the Hon. Charles; and before she consented to eat anything the animal was under proper care.

All this gave Major Pollard time to think the matter over before he had a chance for a private interview with his sister, with the result that he thought better of his impulse to take her to task for her strange habit of riding about the mountains unattended.

She briefly told him that she had been to carry something nice to the miner's sick wife, and then dropped the subject as if it was not of sufficient importance to call for further remark.

When she had gone to her room, tired out as she admitted, the Hon. Charles took it upon himself to interpose.

"Pollard, will you take my advice?"

"That depends."

"Drop this matter where it is."

"I intend to."

Caxton looked into the eyes of his host a moment, and then said:

"I think that a few days more of suspense, if you will be patient, is all that will be required of you."

Major Pollard turned away his eyes, and replied not a word.

While her horse was lame Amy had another assigned to her use, and continued her habit of riding at will.

Now she seemed strangely attracted to the vicinity of the upper dam.

She found the exact spot where Sandy Andy had told his love so impassionedly, and having gathered flowers in the vicinity, she would sit there arranging them.

The place was a wild silvan solitude, with the silence broken only by the twittering of birds and the rippling of water.

While sitting there she had nothing of the appearance of expecting to meet any one. She seemed entirely engrossed with her flowers. But her face was radiant with happiness, and when she bent from time to time and kissed the flowers, an observer would have thought that she was passionately fond of them.

When she arose and went away, the spot was always strewn with blossoms that had fallen from her lap. There was no apparent design in this.

But there was one who saw this with a clearer understanding.

If she had detected the burning glances that were bent upon her from a secret place among the rocks and foliage, it would have driven the color from her cheeks at the moment when the

softest bloom came into them at thought of what she was really doing.

"Sweet on him!" growled Black Bob, in detailing the matter to Billy Cabiney, who listened with his mouth open with interest. "Waal, I should smile! Why, man, you'd take her to be the softest-hearted little daisy that ever had her head turned with foolishness, an' she as proud as Lucifer to everybody but Sandy Andy. She comes thar and strews flowers on the spot whar he made love to her—hang me ef she don't!—jest as if it was a grave."

"A grave!" cried Billy Cabiney.

Then he laughed.

"Do you 'low as a grave is the only place—"

"Cheese it!" interposed Bob. "I know that as well as you do. But the thing for us to consider is, that it won't do us no good to have her nosin' about in our way."

"That's so," admitted Billy. "How air we to git shut of her?"

"I've got that all chalked out. You drop a line to Major Pollard, askin' him ef he's be- knownst to the fact as how his sister is ridin' out fur to see her lover, all on the sly. That'll sicken him, an' good-by to her skylarkin'!"

"But Sandy don't come up hyar."

"That's all so; but how's the major to know that?"

"So I sets down an' tells him, an' then he goes an' mounts Sandy Andy, an' Andy he comes an' climbs me. Oh, no; not fur Joel!"

"Waal, you be a fool! Do you 'low to put yer fist to that?"

"I don't 'low to have nothin' to do with it at all!"

"Waal, I'll bet you two to one you will!"

The two men looked at each other, and the weaker "caved."

"What good will it do you to git me into a dirty hole?" he cried.

"You do as I tell ye, an' you're all right," answered Black Bob. "I 'low to have got this thing all chalked out straight. You tell him the undersigned is his solid friend, an' that's all you tell him. Then how is he to know who a friend is, I want to know?"

So it came about that Major Pollard stood with an anonymous letter clinched in his hand, while his nostrils quivered and the veins stood out like whip-cords on his forehead.

For perhaps ten minutes he stood motionless, and then he formed his resolve.

He would not take the Hon. Charles into his confidence. No; that critical gentleman knew enough, and to spare, already. He would act for himself.

By way of preparation, he made a careful examination of his revolvers.

CHAPTER XV.

READY!

On the following day, Amy Pollard went upon her usual errand of kindness to the miner's wife.

On her way back, she rode along reflecting on the most recent occurrence at the fort.

The evening before, her brother had not made his appearance at dinner, but had sent his excuses. He was not feeling well.

With a tenderness possibly born of her new relations to Sandy Andy, Amy had gone and knocked at his door for admittance.

He had declined to see any one, saying through the door that he only wanted rest and quiet, and asking her not to make a fuss about him.

At breakfast he was still absent. He had gone out before any one was up, leaving word that he was not to be waited for.

And now Amy was going over the event, recalling with a strange feeling of uneasiness the sound of his voice when he had spoken to her.

"Was it a cold?" she asked herself. "His voice sounded hoarse. Was it anger? Can he have discovered anything, or does he suspect?"

That thought sent the blood into her face, and out again, leaving her pale with a blended emotion—of indignation on her own account, and of apprehension on her lover's.

"If he should interfere in that way," she said.

But there she broke off, with a proud lift of the head and a compression of the lips.

She knew her brother's haughty spirit, but she did not yet dream to what lengths it might lead him.

She put these disagreeable thoughts out of her mind, and had softened with tender dreaming of the part of her errand that yet awaited execution, when she was startled by the sound of a dislodgment of stones, followed by a low, in-

voluntary ejaculation, as if some one had slipped and turned an ankle.

Amy Pollard was as quick of wit as she was firm of courage.

The sound came from behind her, at a sufficient distance so that there was no danger of her being seized with a sudden spring.

The girl did not look round, nor in any way betray consciousness.

From that moment, however, she listened with the keenness of a savage.

"Some one is following me!" she reflected.

"Who, and for what purpose? If it is to come to that—a game of wits—we will see who wins!"

Her first thought was of her brother. She tried to persuade herself that he would not stoop to espionage; but in answer to this a score of little things came up before her mind to convince her that she had been drifting on blindly, without seeing what was developing about her.

She reviewed her brother's manner ever since the day he had been rude to Sandy Andy. He had not been himself. He had been polite to her—too coldly polite, in fact.

And now what?

She took one precaution, at any rate. She did not go to the dam, as had been her wont.

Three days of uncertainty followed.

Her brother met her at table, but with a frigid politeness. For the evenings he pleaded business, and left her to the Hon. Charles.

On the third day she got unmistakable proof that she was being spied upon. On the fourth she knew that the watch was discontinued.

She breathed again.

"He is satisfied," she reflected. "Or perhaps he has got ashamed of himself."

Then came tender thoughts, veined with anxiety.

"What will he think has happened?" she reflected.

Of course the emphasis indicated her lover.

Sandy Andy's absence from the fort was easily covered by the assumption of close engagement at the mine. It was "paying big," and it was natural that, under such circumstances, the manager should apply himself to business enthusiastically, to the neglect of social enjoyment.

The fact was, that the same loadstone that had drawn Amy to the spot where she had first listened to "the old, old story," had acted on her lover too.

But he had gone at night, and stood there under the calm moon and serene stars.

He had sat on the very boulder on which Amy had arranged her flowers, and the moonlight had shown him the blossoms scattered at his feet.

With a low cry, he bent and gathered them up.

"If these are here by accident!" he said, "there will not be others in their places to-morrow night. If there are others—"

He broke off. His heart beat wildly; his breath came in fluttering pants.

If there were others there, he would know that they were tokens of love!

The next day passed on leaden wings. When night came he almost ran to the upper dam, but when he neared the spot, hesitated, and was almost afraid to test his hopes.

But he found them! that night and every night following. Though he was denied the sight of his love, it was worth it, to know that she would establish this means of holding communication with him.

But there came a night when no messengers of affection awaited him.

His disappointment was proportionate to the ecstatic dream he had been indulging thus far.

He imagined a thousand ills. Something had happened to her. She had fallen sick!

He pictured her dying, and he shut away from her!

But then came the greater likelihood that she had been detected. Then he fancied her under restraint, and burned with rage, and could scarcely refrain from flying to her aid.

A second night, a third, a fourth, and still not a sign!

"I will try once more," he said to himself, "and then—and then I will make some excuse to go to the fort, at all hazards!"

During one of those half-frantic vigils, he had been startled by a low, dull concussion, which at another time would have led him to make close investigation as to its cause.

But in his distraction he had only glanced up to see if it was distant thunder; and then, with a vague, drifting thought that it was probably some sort of an explosion at the fort, he had let the matter slip from his mind.

It did not occur to him that a cannon-shot would have sounded louder, even at that dis-

tance, and that, moreover, there was no reason for firing a cannon at that time of night.

He had heard Black Bob's last blast, in making his way through the wall of stone that separated the cave from the bank of clay that backed the water of the dam.

During the following days, while Sandy Andy was distracted with suspense, and Amy was trying to discover by whom she was being shadowed, Black Bob was making the most of his time.

"We've got shut of her, as I told ye we would," he chuckled to his partner. "Now it's all plain sailin'."

"I dunno," responded Billy, uneasily. "I feel it in my bones, as if this hyar wasn't goin' through."

"Hang yer bones!" growled Black Bob, not at all discomposed. "It's because you're a blasted coward. Ef all o' your shiverin's was warnin's, you wouldn't do much to brag of in this hyar world."

"Waal, ef I git out o' this hyar with a hull hide, I'll feel good!"

"You set a thunderin' store by that worthless hide o' yourn!"

"It's the only one I've got!"

"Ef it was tanned, it 'ud make mighty good shoe-leather—fur runners!"

"That's all right," said Billy, swallowing this sarcasm without a wry face. "It ain't tanned yet, an' don't you furgit it!"

"Waal, you bring me that last load o' dynamite Sunday night. Then you play off drunk, an' take your blue Monday, and come to me hyar. Monday night—p'st! bang! an' up she goes!"

CHAPTER XVI.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

THE very fact of her having been watched, convinced Amy Pollard that in this case, at least, the course of true love promised to run anything but smooth.

Yet the moment she felt that she could do so with safety, she longed to return to the tryst—a one-sided affair truly, since her only knowledge of her lover was the fact that he got her tokens.

With what tremors did she venture back, to find the spot so solitary that, but for the dam and flume, it would seem never to have been visited by man.

There was an overflow to the dam, and a recent rain had filled it so that the waste water fell in a silvery cascade down the face of the stone wall, and ran, a shallow rill, along the old river-bed.

This moisture still made the vegetation in the gulch more luxuriant than on the higher ground.

Along the side where the flume ran, its hitherward foundations for the most part laid in the bed of the stream, she saw some flowers which she coveted.

"They are beauties!" she cried, enthusiastically, "and I want to leave him something unusual after so long an interval. I would bring garden flowers, if they were not more likely to betray me."

There was a gully down which her horse could pick his way, and the flowers could then be reached by wading him scarcely more than fetlock-deep across the stream.

With a last look around, Amy started, made her way without mishap down into the gulch, secured the blossoms, and, attracted by others, kept on down the stream.

In the pleasure of culling the flowers she had forgotten her apprehensions, when she was suddenly startled by the sound of a man's voice, so close to her that there was no chance to escape his notice.

"Now that thar's done, an' a good job too," it said. "The last cartridge is in place, an' all we've got to do is to touch off that thar slow-match, an' blow Mr. Dam to kingdom-come!"

With a sudden gasp Amy tightened her hand on the bridle-rein, and turned her head in the direction of the voice.

Then she sat motionless, fearing lest some movement of her horse should betray her, and listened with all her soul.

She recognized the voice, and saw again the scowl of murderous hatred with which Black Bob had regarded her lover when springing upon him.

"I'll be settin' on needles tell night comes, boss," said another voice, which was so muffled that she could just make out its articulations; "an' maybe after that we'll both be dancin' on jest nothin' at all."

"Don't you take on about that," replied Bob. "Who's to spot us, ef we don't give ourselves away?"

"Waal, ef Andy don't look up what you've been doin' fur the past two weeks, I lose my guess."

"Let him look!" growled Bob, viciously. "Ef he finds me, so much the worse fur him. He'll find as he woke up a bad man when he hit me a kick in the ribs; an' I don't get no better by keepin'."

By this time Amy had located the voices, and her distended eyes were fixed upon a black hole in the side of the cliff, so low down and surrounded by bowlders that it otherwise might easily have been overlooked, when the head and shoulders of the treacherous ruffian appeared to view, their owner creeping on hands and knees from the mouth of the cave.

At that moment Amy's horse tossed his head to relieve himself of the flies that were pestering him, and the rattle of the bridle attracted Black Bob's attention.

Half-way out of the hole, he stopped as if shot, uttered a low ejaculation of dismay, and stared at the girl who was gazing at him over the rampart of rocks that ordinarily hid the mouth of the cave.

Following close at his heels, Billy Cabiney ran into him, and uttered an oath of annoyance.

"What in Cain air ye stoppin' fur?"

Black Bob saw that he was detected, so that there was no hope of retreat. But the knowledge of the only alternative left him held him spell-bound for a moment.

His first thought was that he would have to kill this girl who had come upon him just at the critical moment; his second was that he might capture her, and so secure her silence until it could no longer endanger his plans.

He thereupon acted promptly enough, drawing his revolver as he hustled out of the cave, and stood erect.

"Hold on, miss. I'll trouble you to git off o' that thar animile. I've got a word to say to you before you git out o' this."

So far Amy had stared at him, fascinated by the horror of the revelation that had come to her, and of the peril of her own situation.

She had not a doubt that this black-browed ruffian would shoot her with as little remorse as he would thrust any other obstacle out of the way of his revenge.

But she had no thought for self. She thought of her lover, struggling, sinking, perishing in the mad rush of the torrent his implacable enemy was about to let loose upon him.

How could she get to him in time to warn him out of that gulch of death?

Her first thought was flight, back over the way she had entered the gulch, and she cast a hurried glance in that way.

But this was to seek a circuitous way, and one of which she was uncertain, when everything depended upon expedition.

The direct way was straight down the gulch, past Black Bob's revolver, with the chance of being overtaken by the torrent and drowned if she escaped his shot.

The thought flashed through her brain that this was the most she could do—to offer her life for her lover's; and setting her teeth hard, she drew the rein which would direct her horse down the gulch, and hitting him a sharp cut with the whip, shouted at the top of her voice:

"Charge!"

He was an old war-steed, and she had put him to his speed by shouting this command in sport. Now, her life and all she held dear was at stake.

With a neigh of excitement the horse bounded forward, dashing the water on all sides from his flying hoofs.

"Halt!" yelled Bob, leaping over the barrier of rocks and trying to seize her bridle-rein. But now her eyes were blazing. The metal of her nature that Billy Boston had seen was fully roused.

She realized all that was at stake, and acted with none of a woman's ordinary hesitation.

All in one motion a revolver came into view and exploded.

With a yell of pain Black Bob dropped the weapon which he held in his right hand, while he sought to reach and seize her bridle-rein with the left.

But she had measured the distance accurately with her eye. The danger was not from his succeeding in stopping her horse, but from his rage after he had failed.

She shrunk from killing the man, if only she could escape by disabling him.

This was her womanly weakness. A man would have killed him, to prevent him from setting of his train.

"She's pinked me!" yelled Black Bob, with a furious oath. "Stop her! stop her!"

But Billy Cabiney was not forthcoming. He knew that he had not been seen, and he wasn't running his head into a noose when he could avoid it as well as not.

Far from it, he hustled further back into the cave, though he was entirely out of sight where he was.

Raging like a wild beast, Black Bob, snatched up his revolver with his left hand, and opened fire on the fugitive.

Amy had her hair coiled in a knot on the top of her head, surmounted by a small jockey-cap, which was the best head-gear for riding where she might have to pass under the branches of trees.

At the second shot she felt a wrench that threw her head forward, and the next instant her hair was streaming before her face, evidence of the deadliness of the ruffian's aim.

The third shot missed, as had the first. The fourth whistled so close that she felt the cold wind on her cheek. At the fifth, her horse bounded with a cry of pain. The sixth flew wide.

And now she was safe, if her horse had not been wounded with sufficient severity to incapacitate him before she reached her destination.

"Charge! charge!" she cried, plying the whip unsparringly.

There was yet the peril from the rush of the water the villain might at any moment release.

He had said that all was in readiness for the ignition of the slow-match, which would explode a mine that would toss the barrier of rock and clay into the air, and set loose the demon of the flood.

"Charge! charge!"—and the horse responded as if in battle.

The explosion of firearms and the stinging pain of his wound had roused him to the old insanity that the steed shares with the warrior.

"Charge! charge!"—on! on! for life and death! Away! away! on the wings of love!

Now plunging into a pool that might or might not be deep enough to throw horse and rider to headlong destruction. Now striking fire from the rocks, any one of which might turn and bring swift catastrophe and death. Now scudding like a swallow over a stretch of smooth sand, only scored by ripple marks.

Every stride bore her nearer to her lover; but between any two might come that fatal explosion.

Was love destined to win, or hate?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEMON SET FREE.

BLACK BOB saw that the brave girl was out of his reach, but he resolved that she should not defeat his purpose.

Raging like a baffled demon, he rushed back toward the mouth of the cave.

"So much the worse fur them!" he howled.

"I'll sweep the lot of 'em into eternity!"

Amy had shot him through the arm so as to disable his right hand, down which the blood was dripping freely.

Not without pain he climbed the rampart of rocks that shut in the mouth of the cave, and entering, shouted for his cowardly henchman.

"A light! strike a light! Whar air you, you sneakin' whelp? Why didn't you come an' ketch her when I called ye?"

"I ain't doin' that kind o' ketchin', boss. My neck's worth somethin', it is, to me, ef you please."

"I'll break it fur ye, ef I git a-bolt of ye. But strike a light, I say. She's spoilt my right hand."

"Pard, I 'low as it's about time fur us to climb. This hyar tbing is off—"

"Off!"

And Black Bob followed this ejaculation with a volley of furious oaths.

"Off!" he repeated. "I tell ye it's jest begun."

By this time Cabiney had got a torch lighted, and now tremblingly handed it to his principal.

"What air you sot fur to do now, boss?" he asked.

"I'm sot fur to touch off that thar mine—an' that's what's the matter with me!"

"What! Now, while the boys is in the gulch?"

"That's their hard luck!"

"You'll drown 'em all, like kittens in a bucket!"

"I didn't put 'em thar."

And, losing no more time, Bob set off for the spot where the slow-match awaited the application of the torch.

Billy Cabiney followed after him, quaking with terror, and made his last appeal with chattering teeth.

"Hold on, boss! I went into this thing, agreein' to sweep out the flume in the night, when nobody wouldn't be hurt, only in the pocket; but this hyar's murder!"

Black Bob only deigned to glance over his shoulder, as he hurried forward, with a snort of contempt.

On he went, till he came to the spot where he had blasted through the rock and planted his mine under the dam.

There everything was in readiness, the slow-match protruding from the ground like the tail of a snake.

In an agony of fear Billy Cabiney was emboldened to seize the arm of the would-be murderer, and cry:

"Hold on, Bob, fur God's sake!"

For answer, Black Bob wrenched himself free, and deliberately thrust the torch against the match.

Instantly it ignited, and darted forth little sputterings of fire.

With a shriek Billy Cabiney darted toward the mouth of the cave, groping in the darkness as he rushed beyond the range of the torch-light.

More deliberately Black Bob followed him.

Once out of the cave, he said, coolly:

"Now I reckon it'll stand us in hand to make tracks out o' this. Bein' ketched means hemp, an' don't you furgit it!"

On second thought he said.

"I reckon, though, I'll resk it to see the thing off."

"Waal, I can't do no more hyar, so I'm—"

"Stayin' jest whar you be!"

"But, Bob—"

For answer, Black Bob coolly cocked his revolver, but replied not a word.

Billy Cabiney "caved," with a dismal groan.

They went out of reach of the flying rocks, and waited.

It seemed an age. Then came a sudden, quick jerk of the earth, backward and forward, as if the mountain had been hit by a tremendous hammer, and the whole mass of the dam rose with an apparent slowness that was astonishing.

But greater speed seemed to be imparted to the uppermost stones, which shot into the air with startling velocity, and to a great height.

Then vomiting yellow, sulphurous smoke from a thousand gaping cracks and crevices, the great mass of earth and rocks settled back to earth, while the air quivered with a roar like thunder.

The water of the dam boiled and tossed great columns of snowy spray high into the air, and swept backward in a tidal wave.

There it gathered its forces for a mighty rush, and then came onward, a toppling breaker, that swept over the debris of the barrier that had hitherto imprisoned it, and sped on down the gulch, tearing out the flume, and bearing the wreck away in its boiling surge, as if it were built of matches.

God help the life that stood in the march of this liberated fiend of destruction!

Black Bob yelled and capered like a maniac as he viewed the execution of his revenge.

Billy Cabiney took advantage of his preoccupation to slip away and run for dear life.

"Ef he's fool enough to stay hyar an' git ketched, I 'low it'll stand 'yours truly' in hand to git a mite of a start o' Judge Lynch! What a blasted idiot I was to go in with him, anyway, in sich a rackety scheme! I hadn't nothin' to make by it."

Meanwhile, Amy Pollard had heard the explosion, and knew that she was now racing for life and death with the remorseless fury that was pursuing her.

The gulch resounded with the roar of the waters and the crash of shivering timbers, drawing ever nearer.

At last she came in sight of the miners, who were busy at work, as if nothing had happened.

She wondered at this. Surely such an explosion must have made itself heard and felt at a mile distant.

But she recalled the noise that accompanies hydraulic mining, the hiss of the water and the boom and jar of falling masses of rocks and earth. If one of these tremendous landslides had taken place just at the time of the explosion at the dam, it might have diverted attention from it.

And this was the fact.

But even as she looked, there were signs of

commotion. Some one on the top of the bank had heard the explosion, and now saw the cloud of smoke that rose to view over the tree-tops.

Knowing that her voice could not be heard, Amy drew her revolver, and fired it off several times in rapid succession, at the same time uttering a loud scream of terror.

That drew the eyes of the men who were holding the nozzle, from which streamed an arch of water like a long, snowy plume.

At sight of her they dropped the nozzle, to stare in amazement and waking fear.

What could it mean? She was wild with terror—that was plain.

A great shouting followed, and a moment later Sandy Andy appeared in view beside the men who had held the nozzle.

He in that fatal gulch! That was what she had feared!

She cried out to him to save himself, though she knew that her words could not be intelligible.

But the men guessed that the dam had burst, and she saw them turn and flee for their lives.

Instead of following their example, Sandy Andy ran toward her, with every manifestation of solicitude for her safety before any thought of self.

So they came together.

"Amy, for God's sake—"

"The dam! That villain has blown it up! It is sweeping everything before it! Oh, you will be drowned! My love! my love!"

She drew her horse upon his haunches, and leaped from the saddle into her lover's arms.

"Mount! mount!" she cried, trying to free herself from his embrace, and to push him toward the horse. "Save yourself! Do not think of me!"

Without a word he gazed up the gulch, where the onrushing tide was almost in sight, then glanced hurriedly from side to side of the pass that hemmed them in, and catching her bodily up in his arms, ran with her toward the rocky wall.

Arriving there, he set her on her feet. Then began a scrambling climb the details of which she could never recall.

All she remembered was, that she seemed like a child in his grasp, as he sprung from ledge to ledge, to turn and draw her up to his side, then on again, up! up! up! until, with a deafening roar and the blinding toss of spray, the flood was upon them.

She felt his arms close about her as he pressed her body between his own and the rocky wall. She felt the cold rush of air and spray. There was a shock, and for one awful moment she believed that they were being swept from the ledge.

Then the danger was past. The wave that was licking the side of the canyon as it swept onward, to draw all shrinking life into its insatiable maw, was going on down the gulch. The surging torrent that swept along in its wake would not again rise so high.

But see! Her preserver was sinking at her feet with an involuntary groan.

How pale he was! He had been hurt!

"Andrew! Andrew! what is the matter? Oh, you—"

"It is nothing. One of the timbers of the flume grazed me—that is all. You are safe, my darling!"

He smiled through his pain. His eyes told her that nothing could hurt him seriously, she being safe, and showering her love upon him so.

He had sunk upon one knee. She supported him in her arms, pouring over him a stream of words of endearing solicitude.

It chanced that her back was toward the gulf in which they had so nearly met their death, but he was in position to look across to the other cliff, on the brow of which was being enacted a scene of terrible import.

There Major Pollard, his teeth clinched, his eyes blazing, his face as white as death, was struggling in the grasp of the Hon. Charles Caxton.

"Let me alone! I'll kill him, I say! So help me God, I'll kill him!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

KNOCKED OUT!

"POLLARD, you are beside yourself! In heaven's name, listen to reason! What good can come of carrying out this mad impulse?"

"I'll kill him, I say!"

"Not if I can prevent you!"

And the Hon. Charles Caxton, who was no mean all-round athlete, exerted all his strength and skill to restrain the rage-maddened man.

The struggle was a fierce one, but the Englishman prevailed.

"You have interfered with me altogether too much already," grated Major Pollard, still struggling fiercely. "Let me go! You have no right—"

"I have the right of a friend, just as I would deter you from committing suicide. Calm yourself, Pollard. Can't you see that, besides destroying yourself, you will precipitate a scandal almost as great as the one you wish to avoid? We can dispose of the fellow without this useless sacrifice. He isn't worth it."

"This is the result of your efforts to dispose of him!" growled Major Pollard, with intense bitterness.

"Could any one foresee such a chance?" pleaded the Hon. Charles. "But nothing shall come of it. We are the only witnesses, and I pledge you that the next step shall bar any chance of a repetition of the like."

Major Pollard was forced to yield. He was already disarmed. But the Hon. Charles added an argument that was a further salve to his wounded vanity.

"Is not my interest in my future wife as great as yours in your sister?"

And he drew the major away from the spot.

It was fortunate that he had discovered Major Pollard's espionage of his sister, and had followed him so as to be on hand at the critical moment.

But he was pale and trembling with the agitation of a man who had taken upon his conscience a burden incalculably greater than he had intended.

It is only just to him to say that his plans had not included the death of any one.

But now the sight of that irresistible flood rushing down upon the miners hemmed in by the walls of the gulch as in a death-trap, had unnerved him.

To divert Major Pollard from the rage that possessed him, and to satisfy himself on a point that was racking his brain, he hurried him down the course of the gulch, till they came to a place where it gave upon a plain.

Here was an accumulation of the debris of the flume, scattered far and wide, where it had been left by the subsiding waters, which had now all run out of the gulch.

But here also was something far more terrible.

Here they came upon Terry Flynn, standing over the body of a drowned man, staring at the corpse with blanched lips and trembling limbs.

An awful glance was exchanged by the three. They looked at one another; their eyes fell; they shuddered! Henceforth they were bound in the closest of all leagues—that in which the tie is a murder in which all are concerned.

Without a word, they fled the spot!

Of course the greatest excitement followed this tragedy.

Amy Pollard's testimony fastened the guilt directly upon Black Bob, and suspicion attached to Billy Cabiney as his accomplice, both from the fact of their known intimacy of late, and of Billy's disappearance.

The two were hunted like wild beasts, but were not caught—thanks to a little maneuver on the part of the Hon. Charles, who, it will be understood, preferred that they should not be taken, though if they had been they could in no way have traced the suggestion to him.

In San Francisco the bursting of the bubble almost precipitated a panic.

The stock of the Black Hills Hydraulic Mining Company fell as if it had been struck by lightning, and when an assessment was made on the stockholders for a fund to repair the damage—indeed, to begin anew—it went clean out of sight.

The wildest reports were set in circulation. The whole scheme was denounced as a fraud. It was said that there had never been a paying amount of gold washed from the mine, and that the destruction of the dam and the escape of the destroyer were with the connivance of a ring of managers.

Then came a report that the mine had proved fabulously rich, and that the whole thing was a plot to break down the stock with a view to buying it in—a bit of sharp practice that has made more than one bonanza king!

But this report was traced directly to a man who was "in up to his neck, and anxious to unload," and after a spasmodic rally, the stock went down again flat.

Everybody united in cursing Sandy Andy, whose brutal treatment of the criminal—so the story finally ran—had provoked the retaliation for which all now suffered.

In twenty-four hours he found himself sup-

planted by the Hon. Charles Caxton, into whose hands the management of the company was given. He had no means of paying the assessments demanded, and they wiped him out clean! He stood a bankrupt and universally execrated man!

Where now were all of his prospects of wealth? Where now was his dream of love?

For a time the man was stunned. A few friends rallied round him, and would have saved him financially, as far as they could, by placing their "piles" at his disposal; but he thanked them and said no.

What he was thinking of, was the scene he had witnessed on the bluff. Of what avail was money if the hated brother was carried to the point of menacing his very life?

"It will be the death of one of us," he mused. "What matter which? In either event it will wreck her life. Have I a right to do that? I will go away. She will not forget me—not altogether," he added, with a spasm of anguish—"but time will soften her sorrow. It is better so. Ah! if I could see her once more! But, no—I had better take myself off. I have been the cause of enough mischief already."

He wandered off by himself, he knew not where. Time passed, he scarcely noticing the difference between night and day.

Suddenly, he was set upon, and securely bound by men, he knew not whom.

"So!" he said to himself. "This is the end. They are going to have revenge. Well, perhaps that is the best way out of the difficulty."

And he closed his eyes in a dead apathy.

He was startled into wondering interest, however, by a cheery hail of:

"Waal, pardner, hyar we air ag'in'!"

He looked up, and the smiling captor who stood over him grinning with enjoyment introduced himself.

"Corvette, at your sarvice!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A BARGAIN DECLINED.

It was indeed the road-agent chief.

"But what do you want of me?" demanded Sandy Andy, in bewilderment. "I thought—"

"What did you think?" asked Corvett, seeing that Andy stopped with open mouth.

"That you were a party of disappointed stockholders, come to take it out of my hide."

Corvett laughed.

"You're in a bad way, pard, ain't you?" he said. "Waal, the boys is onreasonable, an' that's a fact. But all cattle is contrary. You've got to git used to that."

"What do you want with me?" asked Andy, caring little for the outlaw's philosophy.

"I want to be your solid friend," answered Corvett.

"Excuse me, but—"

"Hold on! Don't you go off half-cocked. You don't know whar you stand, yit. After I let you into the situation, it'll be time fur you to air your high an' mighty virtues."

"Whatever my situation, I don't see that you can better it."

"You don't know that, I tell ye! Shut up that sasser o' yourn, an' listen to what I say."

"If it is any satisfaction to you, drive ahead—the more since I can't help myself!"

"You can't stand me off that way. I don't ask fur your gratitude. I'm doin' of you a good turn, whether ye want or no, jest because I'm a clever feller."

"No doubt!"

"Waal, say, now, who do you 'low sot Black Bob up to cuttin' up rusty on you?"

"I don't suppose he needed any setting-up."

"He got it, anyway."

"He did?"—in surprise.

"You bet he did!"

"How do you know?"

"I made it my business to find out."

Sandy Andy looked at the outlaw, hesitating about the next question.

If it was true that Black Bob had been a tool in the hands of another, who could that other be? He recalled the scene on the cliff. His heart turned sick.

He shrunk from the possible revelation, and yet he was fascinated by it.

"Who set him up to it?" he finally managed to ask.

"Terry Flynn," declared the outlaw.

"Nonsense!" cried Sandy Andy, with immense relief.

"Nonsense, is it?"

"Of course. What has Terry Flynn to do with me, or with Black Bob either?"

"An' who is Terry Flynn?"

That set Andy to thinking.

"You don't mean to say—" he cried, breathlessly.

"Yes, I do," interrupted Corvette, with a grin.

The name of the Hon. Charles Caxton quivered on Sandy Andy's lips, but he had magnanimity enough not to cast suspicion on even his enemy, who might not be the one in the accuser's mind.

"Well?" he substituted.

"Terry Flynn is the valet of a man who has no particular cause to love you, apart from any little money interest he may have in this thing."

"A gentleman," insisted Andy, struggling with the suspicions that began to run riot in his brain.

"It is my jealousy," he kept saying to himself. "It would be cowardly to let that lead me to entertain so gross a suspicion of any one."

But Corvette said:

"The Honorable Charles Caxton!"

"You have no justification of this charge," still urged Andy.

"Oh, yes, I have," answered the outlaw. "I was after Black Bob myself—I make no secret of that—when I had a chance to see that Terry Flynn was playin' my cards fur me. So I laid back an' watched the game. Terry laid out Bob's job fur him, an' seen that he done it, too."

"But Caxton?"

"Let's see ef we kin git a glimpse of his cloven hoof up Terry's sleeve. He was a man before he was a gentleman, as you say; an' even gentlemen will stretch a point o' the moral code now an' ag'in, when thar's a lady in the background. Eh! what do you make o' that?"

And Corvette laughed at Sandy Andy's involuntary start at this allusion to Amy Pollard.

"That ain't all," he pursued. "While you was in that thar interestin' position in the gulch—Oho! you seen the little racket on the opposite bluff, did you? Then it won't be necessary fur me to say no more about that. But you didn't foller their excellencies down along the gulch, till they come to whar poor Ben Shrader laid on his back a-lookin' straight up at the sky, an' seein' nothin' at all, bein' as how drowned men don't tell no tales. An' somehow they fergot to mention that thar leetle sarcumstance, an' moreover how they found Terry Flynn a-lookin' at the dead man as ef it waked up his ideas about the Day o' Judgment. That's kind o' queer, ain't it?"

Sandy Andy stared in growing horror.

"An' that ain't all," continued Corvette. "It must have occurred to you that thar's some leetle objection to your matrimonial scheme."

"What of that? Look out what you say!"

"Oh, you kin tie to me now. The truth will stand me in hand better'n any lie."

"Go ahead, then."

"Before we go any further, what do you say to goin' in with me an' gittin' squar' fur what's past?"

"I say no!"

"All right! We'll give you another dose! You will allow as matrimony is now an' ag'in' a matter o' money, an' as how it wouldn't do no hurt to knock your pile as a starter. Waal, suppose that wasn't enough. The lady might stick to you ef you was as poor as Job's turkey. Now ef they wanted to break you all up, what 'uld they do?"

"What would they do?" asked Andy, with breathless interest.

"Jest what they have done."

"What they have done?"

"You bet! The boss o' this hyar scheme ain't nobody's fool, an' don't you furgit it!"

"What have they done?"

"Made a contract with me to capture you. An' hyar you be!"

"Who has made such a contract with you?"

"The Honorable Charles Caxton."

"Impossible!"

"Waal, I've got the rocks in my pocket fur doin' of the job, with the promise o' more ef the thing goes through all right. An' he didn't let the job out to his valet, this time, nuther. He come to me in disguise. But, bless his innercent eyes, I've been a-spottin' of him 'way back."

"But what can you do with me that will serve him?"

"I might put you out o' the way. But that 'ud be a fool to his scheme. He's a corker, he is, ef he could have it all his own way."

"What is his scheme?"

"To capture you as a road-agent, an' hang you too!"

"But I am no road-agent!"

"How will you prove that? They raid us, an' they ketch you. Seein's believin'. You're hard up—everybody knows that—an' it won't be hard

to make folks believe that you was put to it fur to raise a stake. Most o' the boys won't think very hard of you fur that."

Sandy Andy shuddered. Never was a man in a trap tighter than this.

"Now," pursued Corvette, "I've got a proposition to make you. I like you, an' I don't like the Englisher, nor yet the galoot what's a-standin' in with him. I don't have to tell you who that is. They made this thing up between 'em. That's the reason he let up on you on the cliff. Now you needn't flatter yourself that you'll have any square trial, an' that the truth will prevail. Everything's all fixed fur to put a quietus on you, an' nobody the wiser. You'll step down an' out, an' the girl will marry the Englisher, ef you don't hearken to what I propose, the which it's jest this:

"You go in with we all straight. We'll run the girl off, an' marry her, in spite o' their teeth. Then we'll pick up our leetle pile an' be happy. What's the matter with that?"

"A trifle!" sneered Sandy Andy. "I don't happen to be the scoundrel you seem to have taken me for. I'm obliged to you, just the same, for the compliment!"

Corvette stared.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Of course I mean it!" insisted Andy.

"Maybe you don't believe what I say," suggested the outlaw.

"I am sorry to have to admit that I do believe it."

"And you will give up your girl, an' let her go to the grave a-thinkin' as you're a road-agent, an' marry that sharper? Why, bless your soul! what the difference whether she marries you, an' you a bona fide road-agent, or that galoot, an' he a murderer? He'll put you through, as sure's you live, an' he'll marry her, too. I heard him tell her brother so."

Sandy Andy shuddered. But he stood firm.

"I have said all that I have to say!"

"Hold on," urged Corvette. "You'll never git a chance to see her, an' make it right with her, ef that's what you're countin' on. This thing's a-goin' through, I tell you, an' when folks wakes up, you'll be a dead man."

Sandy Andy closed his eyes.

"All right! all right! It's your funeral," said the outlaw, and walked away.

CHAPTER XX.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

"WHAT!"

"You'll swear, ma'am, not to give me away? I'll make a clean breast of it. I can't stand this—it ain't in my line, so it ain't. I niver done nothing o' the like, an' I don't want no more dead men on my conscience. But if you give me away, faith you'd ruin me intirely, and—"

"Stop!" said Amy Pollard, trying to still the wild beating of her heart. "What is this all about? Calm yourself, and give me an intelligent account of this matter, if you can. You need not fear that I will betray you. Now, go on. Begin at the beginning."

With shaking knees and bloodless lips that quivered at times so that he could scarcely articulate intelligibly, Terry Flynn proceeded to unbosom himself.

It appeared that, since he had gazed on the victim of his treacherous suggestion, he had not had a night's quiet sleep, and now that he was brought face to face with the prospective death of Sandy Andy, covered with unmerited infamy, he could no longer hold out.

He had been struck by the spirit Amy had more than once displayed, and he sought through her woman's wit to find some way of saving himself from further criminality without a public break with his master.

He knew the Hon. Charles better than any one else did, and was not ashamed to admit to himself that he was afraid of his revenge, if this betrayal of his interests once came to light.

Without reserve, therefore, he told Amy of what he had done, and what was its purpose.

"And now," proceeded the girl, breathlessly, "what is this that you hinted at about Mr. Blake's being a prisoner? A prisoner for what?"

"Waal, ma'am," stammered Terry, "you must know as Misther Chairles has taken a liking to yez, an' yer brother has nothin' ag'in' it."

"Skip that, and come to the point, if you please. Where is Mr. Blake, and who has imprisoned him, and for what?"

"He's in the gaird-house now—"

"Here in the fort? Impossible!"

"You wouldn't think it, but he's thayre all the same."

Amy started up as if to go at once to her lover,

her cheeks flushed with indignation, her eyes aflame.

But Terry stopped her.

"Hold a bit, ma'am," if you please. An unlucky step now will ruin us all."

She sunk down trembling. She had an awful feeling of being overhung by some peril with which she might be unable to cope.

Terry then revealed the plot by which Sandy Andy was to be captured by the road-agents, to be given into the hands of the raiding soldiers in such a way that it would appear that he had been one of them.

"And he was so taken?" gasped Amy.

"Thayre was a fight," said Terry; "the road-agents ran; and the soldiers found his Honor lying sinseless wid the mairk of a bullet along his skull."

"And is it believed that he was really one of the outlaws?" cried Amy, aghast.

"Well," replied Terry, "he was haird up—iverybody knew that."

"And they believe that he took to the road?"

"It's haird to say to you, ma'am; but nobody spakes a good word fur 'um."

"And he is now in the guard-house, here in the fort?"

"He is that, ma'am."

"He shall be out of in five minutes!" cried Amy, once more starting to her feet. "I said that I would not betray you, but my brother at least must be taken into our confidence. I will persuade him—"

"A word, ma'am! You'll b'lave that he wouldn't be thayre widout the major's ordhers."

"But as soon as he knows—"

"You force me to say it, ma'am. But he's much ag'in' your likin' for Misther Blake, so he is."

Amy stared and gasped. Terry's looks more than what he said began to convey his meaning to her.

"Do you mean to say—"

"It's my master as set him up to it. Bad luck to me that iver I had to say that same!"

Amy sunk back into her chair, as if she had received a blow.

"Tell me all that you know about this," she said, hoarsely.

As delicately as he could, Terry convinced her that her brother was a party to the plot to destroy her lover.

Then he developed a counter scheme of his own.

"Ma'am, you'll pardon me," he said, "if I make too bold. But I saw you in the gulch when the wather came near washing you away. I know what you think of Misther Blake, an' the same is no dishonor to you. Well, it's in a haird strait ye air, if ye'll stop to think of it. You'll not give him up to a shameful death—that goes widout saying. But how'll ye save him? Your brother is set dead ag'in' 'um, more than you know. If you got him clear o' this, the major would call 'um out, and shoot 'um, too, before he'd see you wedded to 'um. But then, are ye ready to tell the world that your brother was in this same? A trial would fetch it all out."

Amy wrung her hands in hopeless despair.

"What can I do? what can I do?" she cried.

"Would you marry him wid this shame hangin' over him?" asked Terry, point-blank.

In her agitation Amy did not notice this, but cried impulsively:

"Before all the world! this very hour!"

"Well, more honor to you!" cried Terry, admiringly, and it must be added, with not a little relief. "I thought you would sp'ake that word, so I got everything ready in advance."

"What do you mean?"

"Thayre are horses in readiness, and the guard is Sandy Andy's friend. By morning you can be out of all yer troubles, so ye can, if you're minded to it."

The girl sprung up, white with excitement. But there was a look of indomitable resolve in her clear eyes.

"Can you take me to him?" she asked.

"At ten o'clock to-night," answered Terry.

"I shall be ready!" she replied, not a nerve quivering.

"It's worth going through anything to get the like of her!" cried Terry, when he had left her presence. "I'd stand in Sandy Andy's shoes fur the chance meself!"

CHAPTER XXI.

ALL FOR LOVE.

So Sandy Andy lay in prison, and a more utterly miserable man it would have been hard to find.

Everything had turned out as Corvette had warned him. There had been a brush between the road-agents and the soldiers, in which all the latter save their leaders were deceived.

Sandy Andy had been taken to the spot bound. At the moment of the attack Corvette himself had fired the shot that had stunned his prisoner, whom he had then left to be taken by the soldiers.

Where appearances were so dead against him, who would have believed such a story as his defense, even if he could have brought himself to repeat the plot as Corvette had detailed it to him?

Again, why save himself at the expense of her brother's honor, if he could have secured belief? And if he failed to make himself believed, it would not add to her happiness to know that his last act was an attempt to blacken the reputation of one so near and dear to her.

No! let it all go. She was lost to him, in any event. Of course, it was hard to know that she would always be tortured with doubts of his innocence, if her love for him made her more lenient than the rest of the world.

But let it go! let it go!

In the darkness he lay and longed for the relief of the oblivion of death.

Then came the sound of cautious footsteps, the opening of his prison door, a hurried step, and:

"Andrew!"

"Amy! Good heavens! you here?"

But her arms were about him. She was sobbing and shivering, and cautioning him to silence.

"Oh, my darling!" she breathed, "that it should ever have come to this!"

"You do not believe—"

"Hush! hush! I know everything."

"Everything? What do you know?"

"You cannot ask me to repeat it. It has broken my heart. But I have come to save you."

"Save me? How? There is no way."

She hesitated. Something put it into her heart to try him.

"Cannot the truth be told?" she asked.

"Never!" he answered. "If you attempt it, I will make a confession that will nullify anything you can say. No such sacrifice shall be made for me. You have not reflected. It has gone so far that one or the other of us must fall. If I were to save myself, I should lose you just the same. So why destroy both? No, no! let the miserable matter rest as it is."

"But shall an innocent man—"

"Say no more. You believe in me. I care nothing for the rest. Ah! Amy, Amy, this was kind."

He strained her to his breast.

For a moment she could not speak.

When she could find voice, she said:

"I have another way. All is arranged. If— if—you—will—"

The words choked her.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked. "Speak!"

"If, after what has happened, you will yet consent to—to—take me—"

"Take you?"

"We will fly together!"

"Amy! What do you say? What do you mean?"

"That I love you so that I could never survive you!"

"Oh! but you do not know what you are saying! You do not know what hope—"

His head was in a whirl. He was almost beside himself with the mad thrill that her proposal called up.

"No! no!" he said, brokenly. "I should be covered with infamy! Do you think that I would consent to such a sacrifice as that? You think to make reparation—"

"Reparation! If! When I am grasping at my only chance of happiness!"

"With a man who stands with a price set on his head—a felon before the law! A fugitive from justice—one who will never be free from the fear of being dragged from your side by the secret emissaries of the law, or by a Vigilance Committee! No! no! let—"

"You will force me, then, to denounce—my own—"

"Stop, Amy!"

"I will stop at nothing to save you! If you leave me no alternative, I will force a full investigation into this matter. I will break my pledge not to betray the one to whom I owe the assurance—the perfect assurance that leaves nothing to surmise—of your innocence—of your unparalleled wrongs! I will spare no one, I tell you! Drive me to it, and—and—I may end by killing myself, but everything shall come to

light! No tie shall bind me! I will not endure that such infamy shall fall upon you!"

She was speaking wildly, with broken, hysterical articulations. She had drawn away from him, but suddenly she threw herself upon him, twining her arms about him.

"Come, come, my love!" she pleaded. "What do we care for the world's opinion? We shall be all in all to each other. Is not that enough?"

Who could resist her?

He would have been more or less than human if he could have shut away the vision of bliss that she opened up before him.

He caught her in his arms. He held her fast. What was the misjudgment of the world, after all, if he had her, her life not blasted by any act of violence passing between him and her brother?

It was the only way. All else was shrouded in the black darkness of despair. Was it possible?

"Can we escape?" he asked.

"Everything is prepared," she answered.

"But I am bound."

"They shall be removed."

"And my guard—"

"Is on our side. Otherwise I should not be here."

She made a signal. A man drew near in the darkness. In silence Sandy Andy's shackles were removed.

Then they crept out into the night.

"May God forgive me if I am doing wrong!" breathed Andy.

"You are giving me the one desire of my life," said Amy, with her lips close to his ear.

They made their way out of the fort, with no one to challenge them. There is nothing that so much impairs the eyesight and hearing as gold-dust.

When they were in the saddle, a hand clasped Sandy Andy's.

"You will forgive me, sir, for my share in this?" asked a low voice.

"I have no room in my heart for resentment," replied Andy.

And indeed, never in his life had he been so happy as in that supreme moment.

"I'll never forgive myself," responded the same low voice, brokenly.

Then they moved cautiously away, and soon increased their pace, until they were going like the wind.

What need to detail the hardships of the weeks while they lived in the wilderness, hunted like wild beasts, again and again in danger of apprehension, yet never taken?

Why detail the wild rage of Major Pollard; the secret meeting between him and the Hon. Charles Caxton, in which the latter was left for dead in the care of his valet, Terry Flynn, the world never getting at the truth of that mysterious matter; the intense excitement of all the region, recalled even to this day, over the fruitless pursuit?

Major Pollard, overwhelmed with chagrin at the scandal that had crushed his pride, resigned his post in the army, and disappeared, no one knew whither.

The Hon. Charles Caxton had no further connection with the mining enterprises from which he had expected so much. Before he recovered—which he did, eventually—the flume had been rebuilt, and operations resumed; but the gold seemed all to have been in that portion of the bank which Sandy Andy had washed.

He too took himself off.

One day, in the southern part of the State of California, a carriage drove up to one of the old mission houses.

From the vehicle was lifted a lady, in the strong arms of a man whose exquisite tenderness at once won the heart of the good padre.

The lady herself was pale with illness, and so weak that her languid eyes closed as she lay with her head on the breast of the man who bore her.

What did they want here? Why, to be married, of course! Who could look upon her exquisite beauty and on his tenderness, and for a moment guess otherwise?

So the good father made them one, and when they had gone, away toward the south, he sighed, and recalled more than once in his dreams—for priests are yet sufficiently human to have such dreams now and then—recalled, I say, more than once in his dreams, the ecstatic smile with which the lady had looked into the eyes of her lover husband when receiving her bridal kiss.

THE END.

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